

MARITAL ENHANCEMENT AND ENRICHMENT AS IT RELATES TO  
AFRICAN AMERICAN COUPLES IN A POSTMODERN CONTEXT

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis contains thoughts and insights on a system and communications approach to improve marriages of African-American families in a post-modern context. Although many of these principles can be used cross-culturally, I chose to research and write specifically in the African-American context because this is my cultural background. There is such a great need for ways, strategies, and ideas that will decrease the divorce rate in this community. Even though this paper focuses on the marital enrichment of African-American marriages, these findings have beneficial qualities that reach across racial and cultural boundaries.

I use the term post-modern in the title of my thesis. We live in a post-modern era. Authors Balswick and Balswick (2005) remind us that post-modern thinking rejects a return of the family to a romanticized past. The post-modern approach incorporates the good in all types of family forms and belief systems. In post-modernisms extreme forms, it has the potential to do great harm to traditional family values because it takes an all-inclusive and anything goes approach. The post-modernist views everyone is an expert, and that there are many ways of knowing truth. The problem with a strict post-modern view is its inability to respond to the enormous amount of hurting family systems in dire need of healing. I strongly believe that marriages and families can improve greatly given the right tools and information. The most effective for clergy and counselors alike in this post-modern era is the model that combines psychological theories with Biblical principles. This is the equation for successful outcomes in marriage and families.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most pressing issues facing the American post-modern culture is how to preserve the Christian marriage. In this post-modern society there are so many obstacles and roadblocks that cause marriages to detour from the road that God wants us to travel. Christian marriages in general and African-American marriages specifically are having a hard time during these turbulent times. American mass media covers a plethora of topics, however neither much effort nor emphasis is placed on family enhancement, marital enhancement or effective parenting. Why is this case? Why don't the mainstream media outlets focus their vast financial resources on educating the public with concrete ways to make families, marriages, and children's lives more productive?

Marriages in America are in a state of crisis. The latest marriage statistics from the U. S. Census Bureau on marriage are:

- The ratio of marriage to divorce is two to one.
- The marital status for females 15 and over from 1950-2005 shows that the population of unmarried women will soon surpass the number of married women. (This indicates a rejection of the divine institution of marriage by the population.)
- The number of unmarried couple households is steadily increasing.
- The children of divorce, living with only one parent, have increased from 9% in 1960 to 30% in 2005, resulting in a 29.52% increase. Of those, 83% of the children live with their mothers.
- There were approximately 2,230,000 marriages in 2005, down from 2,279,000 the previous year, despite a total population increase of 2.9M over the same period.

- The divorce rate in 2005 (per 1,000) was 3.6%, the lowest rate since 1970 and down 4.2% in 2000 and from 4.7% in 1990.
- The marriage rate in 2005 (per 1,000) was 7.5%, down from 7.8% the previous year.
- In 2004, the state with the highest reported divorce rates was Nevada at 6.4 (per 1,000). Arkansas was a close second with a divorce rate 6.3, followed by Wyoming at 5.3. The District of Columbia has the lowest reported divorce rate at 1.7, followed by Massachusetts at 2.2 and Pennsylvania at 2.5.
- As of 2003, 43.7% of custodial mothers and 56.2% of custodial fathers were either separated or divorced. In 2002, 7.8M Americans paid about \$40B in child/spousal support (84% of the payers were male) (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2005).

These statistics are quite troubling, to say the least. “Born Again Christians” are just as likely to divorce as non-Christians, according to a Barna Group Survey (Barna Group, 2004). With the statistics for divorce being so high among Americans in general and Christians specifically, much work needs to be done in order to help save a generation and to ensure that Christian values for marriage are maintained. Perhaps some people would be well served to divorce and some people should have never originally married. Many marriages that are being lost, however, can be saved in our society if the couples only have the right tools. This author strongly believes that it is not the lack of love that causes divorce. It is a lack of knowledge and skill that is required to live with another person. Hosea 4:6 when it says, “My people perish because of a lack of knowledge.” This author believes that the divorce statistics can be changed with prayer, effective counseling, and much effort by couples. The African-American church must be the means through which black families unite to invest their time and resources to accomplish essential economic, social, and political objectives for the black community.

Because modern laws have come to treat marriage as a contract rather than a sacred sacrament (White, 1997), the phrase, "Marriage is a commitment!" is often misunderstood (Balswick and Balswick, p. 84). Our post-modern society has blurred the distinction between contract and covenants. People in modern society make and break contracts. From athletes to real estate agents, contracts are easily broken. God is calling for a higher level of commitment than a contract and that higher level of commitment is a covenant relationship with God. In the book, *On Being Human*, Ray Anderson (1982) utilizes the concept of covenant to build a theological anthropology. Beginning with the theological truth that "humanity is as existence in covenant relation with God" (p. 37), Anderson applies the concept of covenant to human relationships, including husband/wife and parent/child. Anderson considers such covenant relationships in the family as "second order, made possible by the primary order of differentiation as male or female" (p. 52). God's definition of marriage as male and female working in unison creates a beautiful tapestry of inter-dependence and collaboration between people.

Anderson and Guernsey (1985) explain the concepts of family in the book entitled, *On Being Family*. Anderson and Guernsey describe covenant as the "Unilateral relations established by God with His people, Israel, through specific actions by which the married individuals fashion an entire nation into a history of response" (p. 33). In Hugenberger's book, *Marriage as Covenant* (1994), he writes of Malachi 2:14, which says: "You ask, Why does he not? Because Yahweh was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant." Hugenberger asserts that although Malachi nowhere mentions a satisfying oath in connection to marriage, the presence of such an oath, which would

invite the deity to act as a witness, is implied by his explicit identification of Yahweh as a “witness between the husband and his wife.” Hugenberger continues this thought:

If marriage was understood more widely as a sanction sealed commitment between a husband and wife to which the deity was witness, even if the other text are less explicit than Malachi, four interpretations follow, for which we may see evidence.

First, if a covenant existed between a husband and his wife, any offense against the marriage, by either the husband or the wife, may be identified as sin, perfidy or infidelity against the other.

Second, if the covenant existed between a husband and wife, because God is invited in any covenant (ratifying oath to act as guarantor of the covenant), any marital offense by either husband or wife may be identified as an offense against God.

Third, if a covenant existed between the husband and the wife, because God is invited in any ratifying oath, to act as guarantor of the covenant, any marital infidelity ought to prompt God’s judgment against the offending party.

Finally, if a covenant existed between a husband and his wife, because the deity is involved in any ratifying oath, inter-marriage with pagans ought to be prohibited because idolatry would necessarily ensue when a ratifying oath is sworn (Hugenberger 1994, pp. 281-282).

Balswick and Balswick (2005) speak on the importance of marriage as covenant as well. Stuart McLean (1984), in a paper entitled, *The Language of Covenant and a Theology of the Family*, suggests that “covenant can effectively be used as a metaphor for marriage and family relationships.” Describing the relational components of covenant, he makes the following observations:

(1) People are social and live in communities; (2) the basic unit of family and covenant is the dyad; (3) persons living in community will experience struggle and conflict as well as harmony; (4) persons living in covenant must be willing to forgive and be forgiven by each other; (5) persons living in covenant must accept their fondness to each other; (6) persons living in covenant will accept laws in the form of patterns and order in relationships, and (7) persons living in covenant will have temporal awareness as they carry a memory of the past, live in the present, and anticipate all the way to future. (pp. 4-32)

In order to fully understand marriage as God intends marriage to be understood, the idea of covenant is essential to comprehend. Balswick and Balswick (2005) deal with

the concept of covenant in their book, *The Family*. Here the authors describe a theology of family relationships that involves four sequential, but nonlinear stages: covenant, grace, empowering, and intimacy. The authors further suggest that family relationships will either be dynamic and nurturing or stagnant and dying (p. 20). Balswick and Balswick (2005) give a model of this process of family relationship. (See figure 1, p. 20).

In summary, for a marriage to be dynamic and what God intends for it to be, both people in the relationship must be willing to commit to grow. Problems occur in marriage when one or both participants refuse to do the thing it takes to enhance the relationship. Balswick and Balswick (2005) explain that growth in the marital relationship can be blocked or retarded at any point when one person in the relationship is unable or unwilling to reciprocate covenant love, grace, empowering, and intimacy (p. 21). In many instances, marital growth, happiness, and harmony are thwarted because of the lack of covenant commitment needed for the marriage to blossom.

Because marriage is a living organism, it will either grow or stagnate based upon the effort and work that is invested in it. Everett Worthington (1996) asserts that work is required for a good marriage. In the book, *Christian Marital Counseling*, Worthington uses the example of the second law of thermodynamics that says unless work (energy) is put into a system, the system will run downhill. For example, gardens left untended grow weeds, not vegetables. Work makes a garden prettier, more productive, and healthier. Work pulls weeds that compete with the vegetables for nourishment. Work repairs the damage of torrential rain or of a child who runs through the garden trampling the plants. Similarly, marriages not blessed by work fall apart. Work makes good marriages better and repairs the damage in traumatized relationships (Worthington, 1996).

There is a history of covenants between God and humanity that are the same as between men and women in marriage. Development in marriage can come to a standstill when the husband and wife for whatever reason do not reciprocate covenant love, grace, empowering, and intimacy (p. 21). The covenant of love must be shared and reciprocated for the family and marriage to work successfully. The first Biblical mention of covenant is found in Genesis 6:18 where God says to Noah, "I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark." [New International Version] Covenant is the promise of an everlasting relationship that God makes with His children that He will bless them unconditionally spiritually, emotionally, physically, and financially as they seek to please Him in all things. In Genesis 6 God commands Noah, "Take your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you." Genesis 6:22 says that Noah did everything exactly the way God commanded him.

#### **God makes a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17:1-7:**

The Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty. Live always in my presence and be perfect so that I may set my covenant between myself and you and multiply your descendants." Adam threw himself down on his face, and God spoke to him and said, "I make this covenant and I make it with you: you should be the father of a host of nations . . . I will fulfill my covenant between myself and you and your descendants after you, generation after generation, an everlasting covenant, to be your God, you and your descendants after you." [New English Bible]

Abraham had a big part to play, for God said to him, "For your part, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, generation after generation"(reference). Not only was Abraham required by God to keep his part of the



covenant, God also required Abraham to teach his descendants to follow the covenant as well. This shows that God is concerned about the long term effects and benefits of keeping the covenant. God's covenant of blessing extends from "generation to generation."

Edwin Friedman (1985) writes that our healing and survival depends upon vision, hope, and our imaginative capacity. He believes that it is essential that humanity understands that God places a high value on covenant. Friedman asserts in his book, *Generation to Generation*, that:

Ultimately healing and survival depend on existential caregivers, on vision, on hope, on the imaginative capacity, on the ability to transcend the anxiety of those about us, and response to challenge that treats crisis as an opportunity for growth all attributes are best promoted by leadership. (Friedman, 1985, p. 5)

The Bible says in Proverbs 29:18 "where there is no vision, the people perish, but he who keeps the law; blessed is he." Friedman's statement regarding vision, hope, the ability to transcend anxiety is connected in the understanding God's covenant lasts from generation to generation. The covenant that God speaks of is to last generation to generation.

Having discussed the importance of covenant to God, we now turn to consider how theories of development relate to Biblical Christian anthropology. Theories of development resemble in many ways the stages of Christian development. Christians go through many stages of development as they grow in Christ. First, there is the form phase. During this phase, there is a high level of enthusiasm for the ways of God. The next phase is the processing stage. During the processing stage, the believer learns

actions necessary to become a Christian. Next is the maturing stage. During the maturing stage, the believer becomes developed in the things of God.

This is not conventional thinking, however, this author sees a connection between Piaget's theories of development and the development of marriage and families. Piaget's work was primarily focused on children's development. In researching Piaget's work on the stages of childhood development, this author began to view marriage as a "child" that needs to go through stages or phases to be fully developed. Piaget taught that children progress through stages in order to become fully functioning, mature adults. Likewise, individuals in marriage must process through the different phases and stages of marriage. The first phase of marriage as this author sees it is the infancy stage. The infancy stage in marriage is when everything is new, exciting and fresh. The reality stage is next. The reality stage is when the true nature of marriage begins to settle in to the couple. Next there is the growing stage. The growing stage is when the couple is involved in a career, rearing children, and saving for retirement. The growing phase is the prime of life for couples. Finally, there is the harvest phase. The harvest phase is when the couple has navigated through the previous phases and is able to watch the harvest of all that has been planted.

This is how this author views the correlation of Piaget's work and child development as a metaphor for marriage development. The author feels strongly that marriage and families are in trouble. Couples need help in navigating successfully the different phases and stages of marriage. Prayerfully this author and this paper can assist in the process of helping families to develop.

The experience and tradition that this thesis will focus on is the African-American culture. Stephen Breck Reid argues that the African-American experience has three themes or three characteristics (Reid, 1990). The first characteristic of the black experience is the affirmation of the unity of life. God's activity in the lives of black people spans culture, relation, and politics. The second characteristic of the black experience is that the black American community remains remarkably patriotic even in the face of America's past racial history. The third characteristic of the African-American communities is a sense of critical awareness of the promises of the Declaration of Independence.

All of this is a back-drop to the important point that African-American families, much like families of other cultures, are in trouble. Divorce rates are up in African-American communities and the numbers of single parents are on the rise. In 1986 Bill Moyers, a CBS television personality, hosted a controversial documentary on the black family. Moyers interviewed a sampling of teenage mothers, as well as jobless males who had fathered multiple children. The overall impression of that documentary is that the modern black family was in a pathological crisis. The question that arises is how can a Christian's perceptive help solve the issues that hamper the post-modern, black family. What can Christian faith bring to the table that can address the spiritual, moral, and marital issues that are evident in the African-American family? The statistics and research unfortunately indicate that many types of black families are experiencing the pressures of internal fragmentation and external social forces. The African-American community has faced problems such as an exodus of businesses from urban areas, a

changing occupational structure, imbalanced sex ratios, the re-concentration of poverty, and racial discrimination.

An additional threat to black American culture is that many African-American families are in danger of breaking apart because black men and women have increasingly gotten away from the church and God's Biblical standards for sexual relations and other behaviors. Without a genuine sense of who we are before God and others, we will not visualize or relate to each other as sacred human beings. We must come to an understanding that when moral principles are violated, future generations will be adversely affected.

Lee N. June writes that black men and women must do more to build better relationships, refrain from listening to exploitative music, and come back to a more connected view of God and themselves (June, 1991). The black community has to regain a fresh commitment to accountability and see relationships as life-long commitments and loyalties (pg. 23). African-American communities have always been blessed with men and women who raised families in genuine love and Christian commitment despite the hardships of slavery, segregation, and poverty. Many post-modern African-Americans, such as Charles Barkley, have stated that they do not want to be role models. It is important, however, to reclaim the blessing of mentorship and replace negative images with affirmative, wholesome masculine and feminine identities that shed a positive light on African-American people. This change can only happen when churches and teachers make a priority of restoring essential moral and Christian foundations.

What can be done for black families and families in general in the post-modern era? Hank Allen, Professor of Sociology at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan,

wrote an article entitled, *The Black Family: It's Unique Legacy, Current Challenges and Future Prospects* (Allen, 1991). In this article, Allen asserts the most important thing that can be done is for African-Americans to research their racial heritage, develop a Biblically based self-concept, and commit themselves in their identity to the standards of God in the areas of morality, integrity, and excellence (pg. 26). The only way that African-American culture – and American culture as a whole – can turn around in the post-modern era is to do things God's way, because "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge." (Prov 1:7) A realization must be made that personal success is directly tied to God's purposes being completed. It must be understood that we are accountable to God for our talents, skills, and gifts.

African-American men and women who possess the qualities of morality, integrity, and Christian ethics, must enhance their dating and marital standards, refusing to surrender their purity for a moment of sexual pleasure, thereby role-modeling for generations to come. Fleeting romance must be abandoned. Commitments to Christianity, character, education, career, and finances must take priority. All temptations for illicit sex must be resisted. Black marriages must rediscover the African tribal traditions of making marriage a covenant, involving two families whose desires become intertwined by the union of man and wife. Moreover, black families should also be responsible for channeling the talents of their members into economically productive activities and occupations, as well as exposing members to excellence in all human endeavors.

Because the family is the fundamental social institution that holds the key to the future of the black church and community, families must be formed with a pledge of faith

and character. True love between a mature man and woman recognizes a responsibility to bequeath a healthy and productive legacy to their children.

The task of the black church is like that of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Old Testament – to promote spiritual and psychological rejuvenation among a people that have been wounded by the past and to teach them that the truth of Christ is the way to wholeness. Christ's sovereign rule must be followed by the family. Hank Allen suggests that weak families suggest (1991) weak churches and the reverse is true also (p. 27). The enemy thrives where spiritual authority is weak. (Mark 3:27) The high divorce rate that is rampant in the African-American community represents a vacuum of true spiritual leadership. The people of God, black, white, brown, red, and yellow, must embrace Biblical accountability, responsibility, and leadership.

God, the creator, controls and distributes the creativity, talents, resources, and opportunities needed to bless the lives of our families and others. (Prov 2:5-11; Jas 1:5) Only by giving our lives and resources first to Him, submitting to His word, and obeying our true spiritual leaders can we expect God to meet our family's needs through our own creativity and productivity or through the resources of others. The African-American church is the most vital organization in the black community.

Because churches are still the central, most indigenous social institution in most communities, it is important for the church to sponsor workshops on child-rearing, on the writing of Christian literature, on business development, career planning, and investments. They could also organize political or educational forums as well as sponsor recreational activities. In short, the black church must be the resource center for enhancing the black family and reconstructing the foundations of communities.

Finally, as an African-American, I write this thesis in light of my cultural heritage. Many of the key concepts and ideas would work in marriages and families as a whole. Cultural heritage is a key ingredient, however, in truly helping and assessing the marriage and family that I have researched for this thesis. For a marriage to be dynamic and what God intends for it to be, both partners must be willing to grow. Problems occur in marriage when one or both participants refuse to do the things it takes to enhance the relationship. Balswick and Balswick (2005) explain that growth in the marital relationship can be blocked or retarded at any point when one person in the relationship is unable or unwilling to reciprocate grace and intimacy (p. 21). God desires that black men and women embrace His principles and muster the courage of Esther from the Bible to do the right thing and preserve our families before God. The African-American community needs people who have the faith to raise Godly and productive families. My aim is that people from all races would help train others to be the kind of persons that can help transform this country, and even the world, into the image of Christ.

Chapter II will consist of an integrative rationale that shows a clear Biblical and theological foundation of marriage and family.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

We begin this study with theological perspectives on marriage and family life. In this chapter we present a marriage and family theology that is founded on what the Bible says about marriage and family relationships as described in Genesis and Ephesians. Furthermore, this chapter will deal with headship, submission, a three-dimensional model for marriage, and the Biblical role of sexuality and intimacy.

#### **Marriage in Genesis and Ephesians**

There are several Biblical references that give a theological foundation for marriage and family. Genesis, Chapter Two, depicts the beautiful story of how God made the first family. Genesis 2:18-25 says:

And the Lord God said, it is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a help comparable to him. Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast in the field. But for Adam, there was not found a help comparable to him. The Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh into place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man and Adam said, This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they both were naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

This is a beautiful and striking series of events that led to the creation and the foundation of the first marriage and family. God created the world as we know it, and God created man from the dust of the earth. God said, "It is not good for man to be alone, and he made a helper for Adam." (v.18.) God saw that Adam was alone. God's reason



and rationale for marriage was for man not to live alone. He sought to solve the problem by creating a woman to be a helper to him. Marriage is an institution created by God so that husband and wife can be in a covenant relationship with God.

Ephesians, Chapter 5: 22-23 gives the blueprint for marriage:

Wives submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church; and he is the savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of the water by the word, that He might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spots or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she would be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. "For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let each of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she reflects her husband." (New King James Version)

The scripture in Ephesians 5 gives a powerful illustration of marriage that shows in great detail how a Christian marriage should look. Contrary to what many may believe, a Christian marriage is not about power and control. Paul asks for mutual submission (v. 21) and calls husbands to be Christ-like figures (vv. 23-25.) Christ leads the church by providing leadership and healing, and also by weeping, and dying on the cross. A mature Christian marriage means giving yourself up for someone else (v. 25).

Sherrill Barwell says in the article entitled "Improving and Strengthening Black Male-Female Relationships" (1991, p. 88) that the root problem with human relationships is that we have deviated from God's order and design for the human family system. Dysfunctional relationships are merely symptomatic of a deeper problem. For black

male-female relationships, the problem is further complicated by the stress of being part of a minority community.

All family systems have their traditions, ways of operating, and decision-making styles. Each of us learns a pattern of interacting and communication from the family system in which he or she is reared. Not all traditions are Biblical. Barwell (1991) says the real challenge is to reject those traditions in our relationships that are not Biblical and accept God's re-direction and teachings. This may be especially challenging because to reject old norms requires personal change, commitment, and accountability. Furthermore, it requires taking an honest look at how we function and where we learned our behavioral patterns and then setting out to change our belief and value system to one that works more efficiently in the long run.

For married or engaged couples, it is important to have a clear concept of a Biblical and theological foundation for the understanding of marriage, family, and the spiritual dynamics that are a part of the process. Genesis 2:18-25 describes five basic elements of the first marriage instituted by God and provides a solid foundation for the marital union. These functions are:

- **Companionship.** "It is not good for man to be alone..." This suggests that God is aware of our basic needs for a partner and that He is one who arranges for a "suitable" mate.
- **Permanence (2:24).** Divorce and separation were not a part of God's original design. Until sin there was no need to even entertain the idea. Divorce is not a result of vague and generalized incompatibility and a series of irreconcilable differences. It is the result of specific sins against God and each other.
- **Severance (2:24).** When two people marry, they must understand that the families are joined as well. However, there must be a severance as the newly married leave their families and are joined to each other. In doing so, the couple must make their decisions about child-rearing, house rules, and role

assignments for themselves. The advice of well-intentioned in-laws has been the source of couples' marital conflicts.

- Unity (2:24). Unity in a marriage implies that the couple has the same overall purpose and objectives for their lives. It implies neither uniformity nor total agreement, but oneness in purpose.
- Intimacy (2:25). In this original state, "they were both naked and unashamed." There were no secrets, no hidden agendas, and no hesitancy about honest self-disclosure.

### **Headship and Submission: The Impact Factor to Improving Marital Relationships**

Sherrill Barwell (1991, p.89) asserts that a structural approach to improving relationships in families involves reestablishing lines of authority so that each person is in proper relationship with respect to roles, power, boundaries, and control. Dysfunctional trends tend to be repeated whenever conflict arises unless the relationship has been put into a more workable balance.

In many instances, any discussion of headship between couples becomes intense and requires an official referee. To some, headship means to give orders, boss, dictate, and rule while submission is viewed as a pitiful existence of giving in, being ordered around, taken for granted, and saying yes when one really means no.

Our understanding of headship, however, is not so much an indication of what we think of each other as it is an indication of what we think of God. God is not a dictator. God is not a chauvinist. God has a high regard for both men and women – "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Much of the female struggle for equal rights and power is a reaction to non-Biblical, traditional thinking that women's abilities, contributions, and cognitive skills are inferior to a men's. The early church, carrying on the Hebrew tradition, regarded women as second-class citizens. Girls did not get the

same education as boys, and women were said to be “right-minded” and not adaptable to many occupations as were men (Edersheim, 1982). This same thinking was a part of the history and culture of the English immigrants to this country whose principles reflected primarily a male attitude (Jordan, 1974).

Christ is the final authority in every Christian relationship. Headship in a two-part family is a position given to man by God and is parallel to the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. This position is given to the husband regardless of his income, education, or job status. This fact does not imply female inferiority. For as noted earlier, we are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:28).

To further expand on this Biblical principle, imagine that marriage represents a business where Christ is the owner, the husband is the manager, and the wife is the assistant manager. The image becomes one where the manager knows his staff, is interested in the growth of the company, assumes full responsibility for its operation, and delegates authority and tasks to the assistant manager based on skill, interest, and availability.

The manager is not in competition with the assistant because he is secure in his position. He respects her rights and opinions and knows that she plays an important part in the company’s development. He keeps the lines of communication open through frequent staff meetings. He readily accepts his assistant’s counsel as long as it is consistent with the owner’s rules. The manager is accountable for his decisions and sacrifices time and personal interest for the good of the company.

The assistant manager is also secure in her position and doesn’t need to compete for the manager’s position because she respects the owner’s policies and rules. She may

not always agree with the manager, but they have mechanisms for handling disagreements and conflicts. She is comfortable in sharing her suggestions concerning the management of the business and is not upset when she is overruled. At the end of the day, the assistant manager can rest confidently knowing that the needs of the business have been met. Both employees (manager and assistant manager) are mutually supportive because they share the same vision and the same purpose of pleasing the owner.

In a family following the business example above, there is mutual esteem and unconditional love which makes it possible to work together in spite of each other's differences and faults. Because of their good working relationship, the manager and assistant manager are able to negotiate the rules and seldom find it necessary to bicker over who keeps the kitchen clean, who sees that the car is maintained, or who handles the money. Their relationship is in balance and blessed by God.

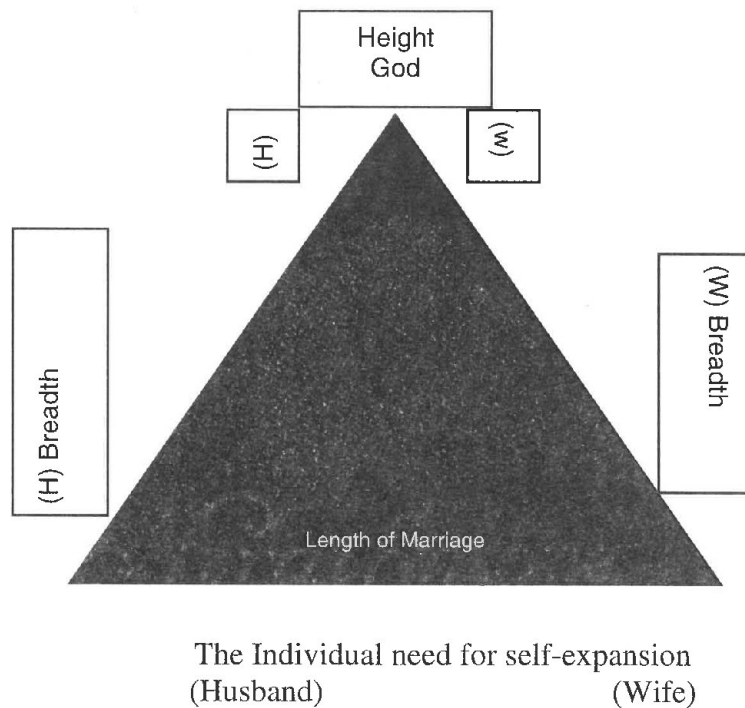
### **Three Dimensions of a Complete Marriage: A Theological Approach To Marriage Based on Revelation 21:15**

In this section of Chapter II, this author presents a three-dimensional approach based on Revelations 21:16. Revelations 21:16 speaks of a complete, three-dimensional New Jerusalem where the length, breadth, and height are equal. This model can be used to describe a complete, three-dimensional marriage. A three-dimensional marriage consists of length, breadth, and height.

The first dimension, length, relates to the individual and the individualistic need for self-expression, self-actualization, integration, and personal development. The breadth

of marriage is the outward concern for the welfare and well-being of your spouse and the fulfillment of their hopes, dreams, and desires. The height of marriage is the upward reach by husband and wife to God. Marriage at its best is a coherent triangle. At one angle is the individual person. At the other angle is the spouse. At the apex is the infinite person, God. A model of this three-dimensional marriage triangle is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: A Three-Dimensional Marriage Triangle



### First Dimension: Length

The first of the three dimensions that make up a complete marriage is length. Length can be thought of as the individual's thoughts, feelings, and inclinations towards the need for self-expression, self actualization, full integration, and personal development. The late Rabbi, Joshua Leibman, pointed out in the book, *Peace of Mind*, that we must love ourselves properly before we can adequately love others. Many people

have plunged head first into the deep hole of emotional suicide, because they have not learned to love themselves in a wholesome way. You cannot love others unless you first love yourself and paradoxically, others cannot love you unless you love you. The great commandment of Christianity says, "Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your strength, and with all you mind; love your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27, NKJV)

In Ephesians, Paul the Apostle, when giving marital instructions of how intently and intensely a man should love his wife says, "Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body but feeds it and cares for it." (Eph. 5:25). These two well-known scriptures assume first and foremost that a healthy and holistic self-love is present before you can love your wife, husband, or your neighbor properly. You cannot make someone else love you. You can only love. You cannot make someone respect you, but you can be respectable. A healthy and holistic self-love entails learning to love your mind, thoughts, your life, and God's presence within. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21). If we are honest with ourselves, our society is not particularly user-friendly to people in general. We live in a society that mistakes sex for love, money for brains, and computer technology for civilization. This post-modern generation says my money is my shepard, I shall not want. It makes me lie down on my green, plush carpet, it leadth me beside my swimming pool and Jacuzzi. It restoreth my soul...I will fear no evil because my money is with me; its purchasing power and privilege they comfort me. This generation says we must look a certain way, be a certain color, have a certain amount of money, be a certain weight, drive a certain car, live in a particular part of town to be

happy, and have a good marriage. What it boils down to is nothing or no one can live up to the expectations that society places upon us. It is an unrealistic paradigm. For Christians, part of developing a strong sense of self-worth is understanding their identity as children of God. Part of learning how to be a Christian is being able to say, “No” to the culture and “Yes” to the fact that God loves us just as we are.

Some people in marriages never get beyond this first dimension of length. They may become superb professionals who splendidly develop their inner powers only to be shackled by the chains of self-centeredness. In the next section, this author will present the next component of a Three-Dimensional Marriage. Thus we see that length is the first dimension of a three-dimensional marriage.

The second of three dimensions that make-up a complete marriage is breadth. Breadth can be thought of as the caring and concern between husband and wife. Breadth is the component in marriage that weds together love, affection, care, concern, and compassion, and communicates that the marital couple is not just concerned about their own selfish well-being but each spouse emerges themselves in the well-being of the other.

There was a couple that was engaged to become married. After some time had passed, someone asked the bride-to-be when the wedding date was. She somberly responded, “There is no date, the engagement is off.” “What happened?” they asked. The young woman answered, “Well, I thought my fiancée was supposed to do all the work in the relationship. My view was that I would help out when and if he got tired, then I would assist. But when he got tired, he went on vacation, and extended vacation, and never came back.”



That is what happens to so many one-sided relationships. Instead of being strong and erect, like the Empire State Building, one-sided relationships look like the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The marriage relationship can become tilted and out of balance when one person feels like he or she is the only one doing the work to maintain the marriage. God has so structured this union called marriage that it becomes crucial that couples cultivate the dimension of breadth. Each marriage partner needs the other to experience marital fulfillment. John Donne interpreted this truth in glaringly clear terms when he eloquently affirmed, “No man is an island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the Maine.” (John Donne, *Mediation XVII*.) Husband and wife are in the row boat of marriage together, and the success of the marriage depends upon both partners rowing up the streams of life together.

There are those who feel that romance in marriage does not last forever, that it is normal for the initial glow to fade. If one wishes to accept this status quo view of marriage, you are cheating yourself out of one of life’s most beautiful experiences, romance for a lifetime. Great marriages, like great lives, take hard work. In order to develop breadth in marriages, couples have to cultivate it, nurture it, and watch it grow. Thus we discover that breadth is the second dimension of a three-dimensional marriage.

The third dimension of a Three-Dimensional Marriage is height. Height can be thought of as the relationship between the marital couple and Almighty God. The height is the upward reach toward that something inherently greater than them. In aspiring to gain height in a marriage, the husband and wife rise and search for the Everlasting One who is the source of all we know and will know. When couples add height to length and breadth, they will experience a complete marriage. As couples seek the face of the only

one who can complete them and make them whole Jesus Christ, the God of the universe and Savior of humanity, is the only one who can complete a marriage. One would be amazed at the number of Christian couples, from clergy to choir members, who do not seek the face of God together through daily prayer and devotion. This erasure of God from the agenda of life may be an unconscious process. Most modern couples do not say “Good-bye, God, I am going to leave you now and pick you up next Sunday.” They succumb to the pressures, stresses, hurts, cuts, and bruises of the daily demands of this world and when the ravaging tidal waves of life come crashing down, a spiritual wipeout occurs. This spiritual wipeout occurs, because no couple can stand together in life without God keeping them balanced, blessed, and protected.

There is another dimension; an unseen dimension that should be activated to ensure marital success. At night we gaze up into the stars that reflect the heavens like swinging lanterns of eternity. For a moment, we think that’s all, but something reminds us that God’s transparent hands are holding them there. This third realm is the domain of the invisible God. The 3-D glasses of Jesus Christ are needed to see into this realm. It is this author’s believe that whether married, single, or engaged, individuals should make searching for the height of God a top priority. This author believes that only through the search for God will couples find meaning in life and be able to meet the difficulties and challenges of life. With God, marriages and families are able to rise from tension packed valleys of turmoil to supernatural heights of inner peace.

In Ephesians, the Apostle Paul gives the blueprint for Christian marriages (Eph. 5:21-23). From a theological standpoint, this author whole-heartedly agrees with the writings of Paul. Marriages, in general and Christian marriages specifically, need order.

Paul in his writing to the Ephesians congregation gives us a blueprint for order in Christian marriages and homes. For instance, Verse 21 sets the tone and tenor by saying, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." This author believes that Paul is saying here is that for a Christian marriage to be successful there has to be an agreement of mutual submission that springs forth from a respect for Christ Jesus. Amos 3:3 says, "How can two walk together unless they are agreed." In fact, from a theological standpoint, for Christian marriages to function properly, there must first be mutual agreement of submission to Christ.

Everett Worthington, in his book, *Christian Marriage Counseling*, asserts that marital problems arise due to failure in carrying out God's plan for Christian discipleship (Worthington, 1996). Worthington asserts that God especially wants marriage partners to make each a stronger disciple (p.160). Like our relationship with God, a husband and wife relationship requires each element of the Christian pattern of discipleship, love, work, and faith. Worthington says that failure in marriage is directly due to difficulties in one or more of these elements.

This author has been inspired by the writings of Everett Worthington's book, *Christian Marriage Counseling*. Worthington says, "Love is defined as choosing to value the partner and choosing not to devalue them" (p. 160). According to Worthington, when couples fail to affirm, encourage, comfort, praise, admire, respect, spend time with, share intimacy with, communicate with, respectively negotiate differences with, think the best of, and renew commitment to the spouse, then love is not being lived out and marital problems can be expected.

Worthington writes when people actively devalue, put down, belittle, discourage, irritate, criticize, become disgusted with, lose respect for, ignore, become distant, impose solutions on, think the worst of, betray the confidence of, and demonstrate a lack of commitment to the spouse, the love suffers and marital problems can be expected.

This author agrees with Worthington that work is required for a great marriage. The second law of thermodynamics states that unless work (energy) is part of a system, the systems will run out of energy and come to a stop. Work makes a garden productive, healthy, and pretty. Work pulls out weeds that compete with vegetables and nourishment. Marriages not blessed by work degenerate. Work makes good marriage better and repairs the damage in traumatic relationships.

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1, Revised Standard Version). When a couple pours out love and work into their marriage, they do not always see the work immediately. They must have faith in God. By investing love and work, they will eventually obtain a return. People routinely put money in a bank having faith they will eventually obtain a return. God is infinitely more reliable than any bank. Marriages need a working faith in God to obtain the Biblical powers and purposes of marriage.

### **The Role of Sexuality In Biblical Marital Relationships**

God instituted sex and each person is a sexual being. Failure to put our sexuality in proper perspective has been an over-looked source of trouble in many relationships. Because sex is only sanctioned Biblically inside the institution of marriage (I Corinthians

7:2-9), the conflict in this area for the Christian rest with singles who engage in premarital sex and with married people who engage in extramarital sex.

“Unwanted pregnancy and disease are not the only adverse effects that premarital and extra-marital sex can have. Snedes (1984) states that sexual intercourse signifies and seals a personal life union” (p. 137). When two people engage in intercourse, they do something that binds them in a life partnership that the Hebrews called “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

Sex and the one-flesh doctrine may be compared to Bowlby’s (1969) theory of attachment and separation between a baby and his/her mother. In the new life union, an attachment bond is formed to one flesh, and any disruption in that can cause emotional trauma for the baby. By analogy, God intended Christian marriage as a “permanent bonding between the same two people” (Bowlby, 1969). In all too many instances, this bonding experience in African-American marriages has been compounded, confused, and one of disappointment and hurt because the union has been disrupted by separation, divorce, and infidelity.

Couples who have bonded to other partners before marriage often have difficulties that would have been avoided had they remained abstinent. Burwell (1991) comments on four common difficulties that people who were sexually active before marriage have.

- Lack of trust. The old saying that “history repeats itself” is appropriate. Jealousy and suspicion, however ill-formed, are inevitable when couples know their mates have had multiple sexual partners.
- Performance anxiety. Unconscious mental processes can be controlling. Sexual competition with former sexual partners can contribute to sexual dysfunction.

- **Guilt.** Guilt is ever present with many singles that, after being involved with multiple sexual relations, feel guilty and have to repent over and over for the same sin.
- **Disillusionment.** Sex is far too often used to make people feel happy and to mask their true feelings. Outside of marriage, no matter how enjoyable the experience may be at the time, the feeling is only temporary. The reality of being lonely and unfulfilled soon sets in.

God has reserved the bond of sexual union for marriage and that union parallels the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:31-32).

### **Summary**

Examining the theological foundations for marriage and family in light of a systems approach to enhancing African-American families in a post-modern contest, this author has suggested in this chapter: (1) Genesis Chapter 2:18-25 speaks about how God created the first marriage between Adam and Eve so that man would have companionship; (2) Ephesians, Chapter 5:22-23 illustrates how a Christian marriage should be structured in love and submission to Christ, and, (3) the important role of intimacy and sexuality in Biblical, marital relationships -- intimacy based on a theological knowing that leads to caring, understanding, communication, and communication with others.

In addition, this chapter presents a three-dimensional model for marriage based on Revelations 21:16. Revelations 21:6 speaks of a complete, three-dimensional New Jerusalem where the length, breadth, and height are equal. This scripture is used to describe a three dimensional marriage. The first dimension-length relates to the individual in the marriage reaches for self-actualization, self-expression, full integration,

and personal development. The breadth of marriage is the outward concern for the welfare and well-being of the spouse and the fulfillment of their hopes, dreams, and desires. The height of marriage is the upward search by husband and wife for God.

Marital relationships can be improved in the post-modern generation by accepting God's order and design for marriage and family. These theological and Biblical patterns will assist couples and families form a better foundation for relationships based on God's principles of trust, love, and commitment.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

There is a substantial body of literature published in the field of marriage and family therapy. The range of topics and the number of publications concerning marriage and family life appear to be expanding rapidly. Aspects of family life covering different facets of marriage and family are being researched and published. However, very little has been published in the area of strengthening and enhancing African-American families and marriages. Something should be done about the lack of good, solid, Christian books and articles that will positively impact the lives of African-American marriages and families.

Good, solid Christian literature and information is the key to empowering couples, families, and parents to learn from others effective ways to have productive Christian marriages now and in the future. Being a pastor, Chaplain, husband, father, son, and brother, this author can attest to the importance of strong marriages and their positive effects on society as a whole. The focus of this literature review is to highlight publications that demonstrate methods for dealing with the idea of strengthening African-American marriages and families in the Christian context. This method, of course, must include personal prayers, intercessory prayer, church attendance, personal Bible study, and corporate Bible study.

The literature review for a Systems Counseling and Communications approach to improve marital enhancement of African-American couples in a post-modern context is under seven topics: 1) Statistics on the state of African-American marriage. 2) Learning



from Black history. 3) Spiritual Leadership. 4) Marriage and Family Counseling. 5) Conflict Management. 6) Any abuse or addiction. 7) Biblical foundations of marriage. The books and articles that have influenced this thesis will be discussed and analyzed.

### **Statistics on the State of African-American Marriage**

This chapter is a comprehensive synthesis of materials that pertain to this thesis entitled, "A Systems Counseling and Communications Approach to Improve Marital Enhancement of African-American Couples in a Post-Modern Context."

The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, through the African-American Healthy Marriage Initiative, cites the latest statistics on marriage, divorce, and living arrangements in the African-American community (Census 2000, <http://census.gov>). The report states that on the whole, African-Americans have lower rates of marriage and marital stability than all other ethnic groups. African-Americans also have higher rates of single-headed families than other groups.

- Black males and females are more likely to be unmarried than Caucasians, Hispanics, and American Indian/Alaskan natives (42.2% of males, 40.8% females, compared to 27.5% and 21.2% respectively for whites, 38.2% and 30.3% for Hispanics, and 35.7% and 29.9% for Asian) (ACS 2002).
- Black individuals are far more likely than whites and Hispanics to be divorced (in 2002, 9.4% of black males were divorced and 13.3% of black females versus 9.1% and 11.3% respectively for whites and 5.9% and 9.3% for Hispanics). (ACS 2002).
- Among married black individuals, a greater percentage of African-Americans are living apart from their spouses than married white and Asian individuals (15.7% of black males, 24.1% of black females versus 5.3% and 6.3% respectively for whites and 11.1% and 12.8% for Asian). (ACS 2002). Only Hispanics have a higher rate of living apart from their spouse than do blacks, 16.2 % for males and 16.9% for females in many cases this is due to immigration complications). (ACS 2002).

- Black families are less likely to contain a married couple than all other groups (46% versus 81%). Caucasian families have an 81% chance of containing a married couple, Asian families have a 67% chance, and Hispanics have a 67.4% chance. (Census 2000).
- Single, female-headed families are far more likely in black homes than in all other groups' homes (45.4% versus 13.7%). By contrast, Caucasians have a 13.7% rate, Asians have an 18.8% rate, and Hispanics have a 22.3% rate of single, female-headed families. (Census 2000).
- Only 44.9% of black householders in family households live with a spouse. This compares with 80.6% for whites, 60.1% for Asian, and 70.2% for Hispanics. (Census 2000).
- Unmarried black women constitute a vast majority of childbearing. Black women and the rate of out-of-wedlock childbearing are increasing. Furthermore, teenage childbearing among black women is higher, although the rate is declining faster than in any other group.

The above mentioned statistics serve as a wake-up call of the critical importance of effective marriage and family therapy, because African-American families are in crisis. The serious problems of teen pregnancy, crime, substance abuse, family dissolution, and unemployment are extremely critical problems in the African-American community that require Godly and creative solutions.

### **Learning from African-American History**

In terms of strengthening African-American marriages and families in the post-modern generation, great lessons can be gleaned from Black history. In the book, *The Black Family, Past, Present, and Future*, Lee June offers many helpful solutions to the problems and crisis of the black family (June, 1991.) June shares creative, imaginative, and innovative ways to assist black families achieve an successful outcome by modeling and capitalizing on the strengths and successes of the black community.

Details in the *Black Family*, Lee June gives important perspectives on: The black family; the legacy of the black family; the black extended family; single, female parenting; inner city teenagers; improving black male-female relationships; the role of the home in the spiritual development of black children; the role of the choice of the educational development of black children; the teaching of Christian values within the black family; Christian counseling in black families; effective marital counseling with black couples; sexual abuse in the black community and its effect on the child and family; sex and sexuality issues in black families; drugs abuse in the black family; the evangelizing of black males, and principles of money management in black families.

This author believes that the issues of single-parenting, inner-city teenagers, teaching Christian values within the family, pastoral counseling in the black family, implementing programs for the prevention of drug abuse, and evangelizing the African-American male are the most important target areas in June's book. When these areas are adequately addressed, a noticeable difference will be observed in the quality of life in the African-American community.

Furthermore, this book grapples with many of the serious issues that face the black community. Lee June shares practical and spirited solutions that when applied are able to lead African-American families into more positive outcomes. For instance, Chapter III focuses primarily on the issue of single parenting. The author illustrates the statistical rise in the number of single-parent households. This rise in single-parent homes show up in problem areas such as depression, isolation, alienation, and hopelessness in the single mother. The author explains that the black church can be a catalyst for change in helping single mothers address the problems that hinder the spirit

and can empower single mothers to achieve successful outcomes. Based on this writer's experience, the importance of the church and other pastoral ministries cannot be overstated.

Likewise, Lee June says in 1965, only one out of four black families were headed by women, however, today more than 50% of all black families are headed by women. Startling statistics preview the reality that single, black females and their children are suffering from physical and socioeconomic problems. Proper education and training would help single parents prepare for well-paying jobs and instill a sense of hope. June shares that a lack of education and training causes the poverty cycle to repeat from one generation to the next.

The summation of the chapter on single parents, Lee June (1991) states: "Many people within and without the black community are concerned with its survival into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a positive contributor to society. Given the multitude of problems facing single-parent homes, it is mandatory that the church work with these families to provide them with hope, encouragement, and stability. The single mother must desire stability in the children and in her through a partnership of Christ and the church that can revolutionize her life.

It is extremely important that single parents be forced in living a life in accordance of God's principles. Problems that previously appeared to be insurmountable then take on a different perspective. God can help the mother establish a stable home and rear her children. Through her God will bless her children and all with whom she comes in contact. She will be seen as virtuous by others. Her children will rise up and call her blessed (Proverbs 31:28)."

In the book, *The Black Family, Past, Present, and Future*, Lee June offers many helpful solutions to the problems and the crisis of the black family (June, 1991). June shares creative, imaginative, and innovative ways in assisting black families to achieve success by modeling and capitalizing on the strengths and successes of the black community.

## **Spiritual Leadership**

In developing this section of the project, this author discovered a plethora of quality books that pertain to leadership. This author believes that sound leadership is critical to the issue of enhancing families and marriages of African-Americans in the post-modern generation. Here is what John Maxwell (1998) says about leadership in his book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. He asserts everything rises and falls on leadership no matter where you go or what you do. Maxwell shares that times change, technology moves forward, cultures vary from place to place, but the true principles of leadership are constant. Moreover, Maxwell states, “Whether you are looking at the citizens of ancient Greece, the Hebrews in the Old Testament, and the Armies in the last 200 years, the rulers of modern Europe, pastors of local churches, or business people of today’s global economy, leadership principles stand the test of time. Maxwell says the laws of leadership are irrefutable (p.19).

In addition, Henry Blackaby’s book, *Spiritual Leadership* (2001), shares specifically on the topic of Spiritual Leadership. Blackaby writes that spiritual leadership is needed in the three primary areas in this post-modern society (p.6). These three primary areas are: politics, family, and the church. Blackaby asserts the sovereignty of God is, in fact, the rule of God in every area of one’s life, including the church, home, workplace, and neighborhood.

In fact, Blackaby writes that society’s problem is more than just a lack of leaders. Society’s greatest deficit is that it does not have enough leaders who understand and practice Christian principles of leadership (p.8.) Blackaby shares the world needs people in business who know how to apply their faith to the boardroom as well as in the Bible

study room. Jesus summed up this important truth for every executive position, school teacher, lawyer, doctor, and parent, when He said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well.” (Matt. 6:33)

Also, Blackaby (2001) asserts that the world is disoriented to what truly makes a successful leader. Blackaby illustrates that spiritual leadership is not an occupation, it is a calling (xi). Christian business people, physicians, educators, politicians, and parents all ought to be spiritual leaders.

Besides writing *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (1998), John Maxwell has written an exceedingly insightful book entitled *Leadership Gold* (2008). *Leadership Gold* was written exactly ten years after *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* was written. *Leadership Gold* is a compilation of leadership principles that John Maxwell has collected and learned over his 61 years of life. Maxwell has come to acquire timeless Biblical leadership principles that can be used to further God’s kingdom on earth. Anyone from pastors, policemen, physicians, and politicians can learn to incorporate sound leadership principles that will make the organizations they lead more effective. Maxwell states it is important to note that leadership requires a commitment of lifetime learning that over your life many people will contribute to one’s learning process of being a leader, that anyone can learn to become a leader, that one can learn from one’s mistakes in the process of becoming a leader, and one’s ability to become a better leader depend on how one responds to the situations that life presents (ix).

In Chapter Two of *Leadership Gold*, Maxwell shares that the toughest person to lead is always you. Maxwell cites that whether we are looking at King David, George Washington, or Winston Churchill, they all struggled to lead themselves well. It is like

Walt Kelly exclaimed in his Pogo cartoon Strip: "We have met the enemy, and he is us" (p.11). Maxwell shares that in order for an individual to lead themselves these questions: 1. How clearly do you see yourself? 2. Where do you need to grow? 3. How well do you take advice? (p.18). This book affirms that good, sound leadership principles can be learned and over time when the leadership principles are practiced, organizations, churches, and businesses can become better (2001).

*Good to Great* (2001) is another excellent books pertinent to discussing leadership and integrating ways to enhance African-American marriages and families in this post-modern era. *Good to Great* is a book that chronicles ways some companies make it and others do not. Collins continues by sharing, "And that's the reason why we have so little that becomes great. We do not have great schools, principally because we have good schools. We do not have great government, because we have good government. Collins shares few people attain great lives in large part because it is so easy to settle for a good life. The vast majority of companies become great precisely because the vast majority become quite good and that is their main problem" (p.a.) This author agrees with Jim Collins on this issue simply because it is the post-modern generation Christian organizations such as churches, seminars, Christian colleges, marriages, families, have to be great, whether black or white, is because so many Christian churches, seminaries, colleges, marriages, and families are not surviving in the post-modern era.

Inspired by the secular book *Good to Great*, Christian author Chip Ingram wrote *Good to Great in God's Eyes* (2007). As Chip Ingram read from Jim Collins books about what makes companies great, Chip Ingram began to pray and meditate on the qualities that make Christians great. As Ingram prayed and interviewed people whom he felt were

great Christians, he began to list the things that great Christians have in common. Ingram writes, "I've begun to observe that great Christians have certain practices in common" (p.9). Based upon Ingram's findings here is his list of things that allow one to go from good to great as a Christian: 1. Think great thoughts. 2. Read great books. 3. Pursue great people. 4. Dream great dreams. 5. Pray great prayers. 6. Take great risks. 7. Make great sacrifices. 8. Enjoy great moments. 9. Empower great people. 10. Develop great habits. This author tends to agree with Ingram in terms of Christians seeking to become great Christians versus being mediocre. Furthermore, this author believes that this book and the other leadership books mentioned in this section will help enhance and enrich African-American marriages and families and help them to from good to great.

Leadership, especially spiritual leadership, is another crucial element that is needed in helping to solve the issues that are facing the African-American community. This author believes that Christian business people, physicians, educators, politicians, and parents should all be spiritual leaders. When the African-American community understands leadership in light of God's calling, the communities will improve. Lee June's book, *The Black Family*, raises some critical issues; however, it does not address the issues of spiritual leadership directly. Spiritual leadership is of the utmost importance in solving the many issues facing the black community. It is equally important that the right leaders emerge. Leadership author Warren Bennis writes "At the heart of America is a vacuum into which self-anointed saviors have rushed." It is critically important that the African-American community have leaders in which they can trust. Clearly, the African-American community is desperately in need of spiritual leaders who can make positive changes in their lives.



Leadership, especially spiritual leadership, is another crucial element that is needed in helping to solve the issues that are facing the African-American community. John Maxwell's book, *The 21 Laws of Leadership*, asserts everything rises and falls on leadership. It will take good, sound, practical, and spiritual leadership to assist the African-American at this most important juncture. Henry Blackaby (2001) asserts that the world is oriented to what makes a truly successful leader. Blackaby shows that spiritual leadership is not an occupation, it is a calling (2001). Christian business people, physicians, educators, politicians, and parents – all ought to be spiritual leaders. When the African-American community understands leadership in light of God's calling, the communities will improve.

### **Marriage and Family Counseling**

*The Family: A Christian Perspective of the Contemporary Home*, by Jack and Judith Balswick (2005) is an excellent book on the Christian perspective of marriage and family. This book is full of facts and information that will help a family, marriage, church, pastor, chaplain, or counselor to minister to the demands of people across racial lines in a post-modern society. Balswick and Balswick give the reader a rich resource in helping the minister to minister to the needs of people, marriages, and families who find themselves hurt or wounded by life to find Christian solutions. In this book are insights that are pure gold. The book is concise, balanced, and clear in its purpose. The authors point out that a Christian family can be maintained and flourish in this post-modern society given the right set of tools. Some of the more helpful topics in this book are:

- From hurting to healing behavior

- Family Development
- The characteristics of strong and weak families
- Rules for a fair fight
- Stressful events
- Creating a strong, positive family environment

An especially empowering theme in the book is when the authors speak of the four theological elements in family relationships. The four elements are: covenant, grace, empowerment, and intimacy (Balswick & Balswick, 2005, p. 20). The authors suggest in the book that family relationships are dying. Balswick and Balswick maintain that the logical beginning point of any family relationship is covenant commitment, which has unconditional love at its core. The authors raise an exceedingly important point when they say, “Growth in family relationships can be blocked or retarded at any point when one person in the relationship is unable to reciprocate covenant love, grace, empowering, and intimacy (Balswick & Balswick, 2005, p. 21). This element of relationships is crucial and underscores the important aspect of individual roles in relationships. When the husband and wife embrace and live out their God-given potential in the roles that they have been given, it makes for a far richer marital experience. In the African-American context, the roles of males and females have to be defined in a more clear and accurate way. Simply, many people have not been adequately prepared for the role that they have to play in marriage.

In American marriages in general, and in African-American marriages specifically, many times people get married without having proper mentoring and role-modeling. In many instances, couples just “get married” without the male or female

knowing what is expected of them. When a man marries and is not aware of the roles he is expected to play in the marriage, frustration occurs. Likewise, if a woman marries and does not know her role in the marriage, frustration occurs. A fully functioning person within the marital relationships is so important because if a person is not fully engaged in the roles and expectations of the marriage, the marriage enhancement will suffer.

Stanley, Trathen, McCain, and Bryan offer some clear suggestions that can benefit African-America family enrichment and marriage empowerment in the book *a Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage* (2002). In Chapter Two the authors share four key patterns that destroy oneness (p. 26). Those four patterns are:

- **Escalation** – Escalation occurs when persons respond back and fourth negatively to each other, continually upping the ante so the conversation gets more and more hostile. In escalation, negative comments spiral into increasing anger and frustration. As Christians, we cannot just say anything we feel any time we feel like it. We read in James 1:26 that, “If anyone considers himself a Christian and yet does not keep a tight reign on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.” Proverbs 12:18 says, “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”
- **Invalidation** – Invalidation is a pattern in which one person subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other.
- **Negative interpretations** – Negative interpretations occur when one person consistently believes that the motives of the other are more negative than is really the actual case. This is an example of “mind reading.” Mind reading occurs when we assume we know what someone else is thinking or why he or she did something.
- **Withdrawal and Avoidance** – Both withdrawal and avoidance are patterns in which one person in the relationship shows an unwillingness to get into or stay with important discussions. Withdrawal can be as obvious as getting up and leaving the room or as subtle as “turning off” or “shutting down” during an argument. The withdrawers often tends to get quiet during an argument, look away, or agree quickly to a partner’s suggestion just to end the conversation, with no real intent of following through. Avoidance reflects the same reluctance to get into certain circumstances with more emphasis on the attempt to not let the conversation happen in the first place.

The authors share that if couples can learn to handle differences and control the negatives, it will greatly enhance the marriage relationship and protect the promise that marriage holds (p. 26-27). Of all the patterns that destroy oneness that Stanley shares, the two that appear most important for creating healthy marriages are de-escalation and reducing the level of withdrawal and avoidance. As couples learn the skill of not escalating and remaining calm during conflict, marital satisfaction will increase. Likewise, when partners can minimize withdrawal and avoidance patterns by learning how to lovingly stay and share feelings in a kind way, couples will be on their way to having a God-blessed union.

Stanley, Trathen, McCain, and Bryan offer some clear suggestions that can benefit African-America family enrichment and marriage empowerment in the book *a Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage* (2002). In Chapter Two the authors share four key patterns that destroy oneness (p. 26). Those four patterns are:

- Escalation – Escalation occurs when persons respond back and fourth negatively to each other, continually upping the ante so the conversation gets more and more hostile. In escalation, negative comments spiral into increasing anger and frustration. As Christians, we cannot just say anything we feel any time we feel like it. We read in James 1:26 that, “If anyone considers himself a Christian and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.” Proverbs 12:18 says, “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”
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Another exceedingly helpful book is *Marriage as Covenant*, by Gordon P. Hugenberger. *Marriage as Covenant* is a scholarly book that introduces and for some, re-introduces to others the importance of recognizing marriage as a covenant relationship between husband, wife, and God. Hugenberger helps the modern reader to appreciate fully the breadth of the Biblical concept of covenant. He relates to the reader that if marriage is understood in covenant terms, then divorce must be discussed as breaking of a covenant with God.

This is an exceedingly interesting concept because America in this post-modern generation knows no distinction between “contract” and covenant. In this post-modern society, contracts are broken on a regular basis. Athletes, lawyers, and businesses all

break contracts consistently. It is seen in this society on a regular basis contracts being broken. Hugenberger defends marriage as covenant and compares covenant marriage to God's covenant relationships with Israel. In Malachi, Chapter Two, Hugenberger interprets that God says to Israel, "I hate divorce." This depiction shows God's high esteem for the institution of marriage. This author believes that God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. Because of God's great and vast love for humanity, God blesses creation with the institution of marriage with a bond of love that cannot be broken. It is important for African-Americans to become consciously aware of the way that God approves covenant relationships.

*Genograms: Assessment and Intervention* by Monica McGoldrick (1999) is an excellent book that establishes the genogram as a practical and useful framework for understanding family patterns. Genograms offer tangible and graphic representations of complex family patterns. Likewise, Genograms allow the clinician to map the family structure clearly and to note and update the family picture as it emerges. To emphasize, the genogram provides an efficient summary, allowing a clinician unfamiliar with a case the ability to grasp rapidly a large amount of information about a family and have a view of potential problems (McGoldrick, 1999).

All in all, Genograms make it easier for clinicians to keep in mind the complexity of a family's context, including family history, patterns, and events that may have ongoing significance for patient care. McGoldrick states, "Just as one spoken language potentiates and organizes one present thought process, genograms which map relationships and patterns of family functioning, help clinicians think systematically

about how events and relationships in their client's lives are related to patterns of health and illness" (McGoldrick, 1999).

It is exceedingly important that African-American families are able to see the influence that dysfunction has had on them. It is so important for African-American families to understand what has happened in their family history in the past. Understanding of family history grants us keen insight into understanding how improvements can be made to enable future generations to be better than previous ones.

There are several diagnostic surveys and questionnaires which will assist in making a more accurate diagnosis and development of a treatment plan. Few good examples are: The Marital Attitude Questionnaire – Revised (Putzner, Fleming, & Epstein, 1983), Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spainer, 1976), Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder, 1981). The purpose of these questionnaires is to aid counselors in making accurate diagnosis. The use of more extensive psychological testing such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is a phenomenal tool for assessing individual psychopathology.

A powerful book that has had a lasting effect on this author is *Christian Counseling Ethics* by Randolph Sanders (1997). This book begins in an engaging way that highlights the importance of Christian Ethics. *Christian Counseling Ethics* is a key component for counselors, chaplains, pastors, and other religious leaders who are serious about presenting the gospel in very credible ways. Randolph Sanders expresses the thought that some people oppose a code of ethics. Some people try to forge their own paths, and some people defy the rules. These are the individuals that do not succeed. Sanders reminds us that there are some bad therapists that are in the counseling field to

advance their own narcissism. This book is a powerful reminder for Christian, mental health professionals, to neither fear their ethical code nor rebel against it, but to allow God to use those of us who labor in service to glorify God. It is exceedingly important that those of us who minister to the African-American community be ethical.

Especially enriching and exceedingly insightful is the *Life Span Development*, by John Santrock (2008.) The study of a person's lifespan is exceedingly interesting to this author. How individuals grow, expand, learn, develop, and age are remarkably interesting and fascinating subjects to study. *Life Span Development*, by John Santrock is educational, enlightening, informative, and intellectually stimulating. One of the many things that this author has gleaned from this book is that one's life is a journey. African-American marriages and families should be made aware to live life in journey-mode.

This book is about the discovery of the universal features of life and the very essence of life itself. Santrock shares about the intricate weaving of the tapestry of life and being a watchful participant in how each thread unfolds. One of the powerful and poignant issues that Santrock revisits in the book *Life Span Development* is, "Why a person becomes who they are in life?" This book shares a stark and sobering comparison of the lives of serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer and Pulitzer Prize winner, Alice Walker. Santrock grapples with the question, "What life events happened in Jeffrey Dahmer's life to make him become who he is? And what happened in the life of Alice Walker that inspired her to rise from the ashes of poverty and racism of the Deep South to become an inspirational success."

Irving Yalom, *The Theory and Profile of Group Psychotherapy* (2005) has many beneficial items that prove useful in marital enhancement and enrichment in the African-



American context. The reader will gain and discover principles necessary for change to occur in groups. These principles work across racial lines and will prove to be incredibly useful in assessing African-American couples. An important principle explained by Yalom is how to deal with different group members. Yalom explains that to deal with differing group members one must lay out specific tasks for them to accomplish.

In spite of Yalom's depth of research, this book is written in a smooth, easy-to-read style. It is filled with great case studies, clinical knowledge, and current research. It contains sections on brief group therapy, online therapy groups, ethno-cultural diversity, trauma, and managed care. In the section entitled, "Therapeutic Factors," Yalom speaks about the instillation of hope. Yalom writes, "The instillation and the maintenance of hope are crucial in any psychotherapy. Not only is hope required to keep the client in therapy, so that other therapeutic factors may take affect, but facts in a treatment mode can be in itself therapeutically effective" (Yalom, 2005).

A companion book on Group Therapy is *Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* by Gerald Corey (2000). This book gives readers a framework that will help integrate theoretical models. Corey gives a lot of emphasis on describing key concepts and theory implications in group practice. Corey speaks about how each theory is applied to group practice and the major techniques emphasized under each theory. This book gives concrete, illustrative examples of group theory that help clarify for the reader how to best integrate these concepts in practice. Understanding the cultural background of the participants is exceedingly important for counselors to have a good understanding of other cultural groups.

Everett Worthington provides Christian perspective and Biblical based theories marriages and marriage counseling in the book *Christian Marital Counseling* (1996.) Everett uses techniques drawn from several psychological schools of thought combined with insightful input from well-known marriage therapists such as Dennis B. Guernsey, Willard Harley, Jr., Les and Leslie Parrot, and H. Norman Wright.

Interestingly, Worthington elaborates on how he deals with the problem of couple intimacy in marriage counseling. Worthington begins by having the couple discuss ways that people in general meet their needs for intimacy. He then has the couple analyze their time schedule in terms of how each activity contributes to meeting the needs for intimacy, aloneness, or co-habitation. An appeal is then made to couples to work hard to forge a new pattern of living. Each partner undertakes a single modification of the time schedule that might contribute to more harmony while still meeting the needs for intimacy, aloneness, and coactions. Meanwhile, an appeal is made to maintain the faith that God will provide a way to work at difficulties (p.169). Worthington says that making a single modification in each person's schedule will lead to other changes.

Worthington explains the distance – pursuer pattern involves a spouse who demands intimacy (the pursuer) and another who avoids intimacy (the distance). In the later stages, the pursuer tires of the chase, withdraws, and criticizes the distance. The distancer quickly realized that the pursuer is no longer pursuing and returns to a moderate distance, where barraged by criticism, the distancer fights back (Worthington, 1996).

If a counselor tries to promote additional intimacy between partners, the distancer perceives the counselor as being an emotional pursuer, like the partner, and the distancer may resist the counselor's efforts to provide intimacy says Worthington (p. 170).

The *High Conflict Couple* provides a rich reservoir of information to help couples manage the stresses of relationships (Fruzzetti, 2006). The author, Alan E. Fruzzetti, wrote this book for what he calls the highly reactive couple. Fruzzetti describes the highly reactive couple as pairs who are quick to argue, anger and quick to blame. Fruzzetti suggests these highly reactive couples need more than just the run of the mill relationship advice to solve their problems in relationships. This book addresses the issue that determines emotions beneath the surface must be dealt with properly before the relationship can be repaired.

This book adopts the techniques of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) into a skill set to curtail out of control emotions that flare up in relationships. Fruzzetti teaches how to use mindfulness and distress tolerance techniques to de-escalate angry situations before they have a chance to explode into destructive fights.

To sum up, Fruzzetti writes that with enough practice, conflict can be transferred to closeness and couples can achieve the closeness, friendship, intimacy, peace, and support that brings us joy and reduces suffering.

Similarly, Scott Spradlin does more research in the area of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT.) In the book *Don't Let Your Emotions Run Your Life*, Spradlin discusses the difference between being clinically "crazy" and being a "high reactor." According to Spradlin, "high reactors" experience over-powering feelings that knock people off balance, plunge people into depression, make them fly off the handle, and without warning, provokes fear.

## **Conflict Management**

Another exceedingly important area as it relates to enhancing marital and family relations as it relates to the African-American family is in the area of conflict management. How African-American couples manage conflict has a lot to do with how successful the marriage and family relationships will be. Balswick and Balswick call the area of conflict management, The Concept of Fair Fighting (Balswick & Balswick, 2005). Before the concept of fair fighting was introduced, all conflict was viewed as detrimental to the relationship. However when couples learn the skill to manage the conflict that occurs in marital relationships, the relationship can grow stronger. Here are the steps in which Balswick and Balswick call Rules to a Fair Fight (Balswick & Balswick, 2005).

- Identify the issue. The first rule of thumb in fighting fairly is to identify the real issue in a conflict. Little progress can be made until the individuals involved know how the other person defines conflict. The first task is to try to understand what the main point of contention is.
- Choose the right time. Many times family members need a 'cooling off' period and must schedule the discussion of the main event at a time that would be mutually beneficial for the parties involved. The timing of this discussion is exceedingly important. It is important to choose a time when both parties can be aware, awake, and alert.
- Choose the right place. Just as timing is important, so is having the discussion at the right place. Balswick and Balswick stress the importance of seeking out a neutral area where all parties involved can be on equal footing.
- Begin with a positive stroke. The discussion will proceed much more smoothly if it begins on a positive note. The positive stroke gives a person the benefit of the doubt and does not label the person's actions as intentional or antagonistic.
- Stick to the issue. Once the discussion has begun, it is essential to stick to the issue. Each person involved needs to ask how they are contributing to the problem and each person should be looking for creative, Christian solutions to solve the problem.

- Do not bring up the past. In the heat of the moment, it is easy to re-hash past hurts and pains. Yet, in all actuality, bringing up the past will negate any progress toward positive conflict resolution.
- Do not hit below the belt. An attack on personal areas of sensitivity is not allowed. Bringing up sensitive areas can be emotionally painful and will negate a positive outcome from occurring.
- Take the other seriously. Ridiculing or laughing at another family member during a fight is inappropriate. When this happens, the other person does not feel validated.
- Express anger non-abusively. The Bible reminds us in Ephesians 4:26 to, “Be angry and sin not; do not let the sun go down on your anger.” The Bible does not say do not become angry because that would be impossible to do. Anger is a human emotion. However, the Bible reminds us that we should not allow our anger to cause us to sin. The Bible also gives as a powerful principle here that is often overlooked and needs to be given a spiritual spotlight. “Do not let the sun go down on your anger,” says Ephesians 4:26. This scripture need to be re-examined and re-applied. Many couples, African-American and Caucasian alike, allow the sun to go down on their anger. When an individual or couple allows anger to settle in overnight, it seems to become engrained.
- Do not be passive-aggressive. Passive-aggressiveness aims to get back at a person in indirect, devious ways, is a very effective way of getting back at another person. The passive-aggressive person denies one’s anger while acting it out in an indirect manner. The couple or family must not give into the passive-aggressive member.
- Avoid asking for explanations of behavior. Asking others to vindicate themselves may be counter-productive in fair fighting. Asking pointed questions that begin with “Why?” may place people involved on the defense. Balswick and Balswick say it is better to back off from the questions and begin to work on solutions.
- Avoid labeling and name calling. A sure way of causing the breakdown of communication is to engage in labeling or name calling. Illustrations of this are to call the other person stupid, ignorant, silly, dumb, or some other demeaning term. Using such labels is disrespectful and blocks serious efforts to deal with the conflict.
- Avoid triangles. Triangling is the common practice for two people that are arguing to attempt to bring in a third party in order to gain an advantage in the argument.

I believe as African-American couples use these fair fighting skills, marital relations will greatly improve. Successful conflict management within marriage will help bridge the gap from a couple being a high conflict couple to becoming a couple that knows how to draw on skills to make the marriage better. When couples utilize the skills that the Balswicks' recommend such as fair fighting, identifying the issues, choosing the right time to discuss the issues, not bringing up the past, and expressing anger non-abusively will aid in developing healthy marriages.

Another major piece in the process of enhancing the enrichment of African-American children is the issue of arguing in front of the children. Far too many African-American children have witnessed or have been right in the middle of unbridled fights and bitter arguments. Maya Angelou says when a child witnesses an argument or brawl between parents; it forever changes the child who witnessed it.

Balswick and Balswick wrestle with this issue of should parents fight in front of their children? The authors contend that children should be exposed to fair fighting by their parents. Children learn to accept conflict as a natural part of relationships when they observe their parents in the process of working out their differences. This teaches children effective ways of settling disagreements. It is unsettling for children to see their mother and father, two people they love most in the world, at each other's throats in bitter dispute. This type of behavior can be passed down from generation to generation. Children learn good or bad observation techniques from observing their parents. The authors offer two suggestions when dealing with children regarding the exposure of the child to the parents while they are arguing. (1) The parents must engage in constructive

dialogue rather than destructive bickering. (2) Certain matters are strictly personal and should not be shared with children. (Balswick & Balswick, p. 263).

### **Drug Abuse and Addiction**

The book, *Modern Psychopathologies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal*, Yarhouse, Butman, and McRay (2005) speaks of addictions as “The Problem of Social Impact.” They state that “from a psychological perspective, economic loss is only overshadowed by the strain on families and entire communities affected by destructive patterns of behavior and the lack of available resources to address such concerns.” (Yarhouse et al., 2005, p. 181). Drug abuse is a critical issue in the African-American community. After the civil rights movement in the 1950’s and 60’s, a drug and gang culture evolved in the 1970’s, 80’s, and 90’s. As modern psychopathologies suggest during this drug culture, a tremendous strain on families, communities, cities, and the nation as a whole is placed. The authors cite numerous statistics regarding the number of people who are addicted to or are abusing substances and behaviors. They further state that we have reached a point of crisis in the United States (p. 81).

Themes in pastoral care are also discussed. “At a broader, theological level and a pastoral level, substance abuse and dependence or addictions are considered problems because people are created by God for the purpose of relating to Him rather than being subject to another controlling influence.” (Vere, 1995, p. 298 quoted in Yarhouse et al. p. 183).

The authors give a brief overview of different types of addictive substances and behaviors. It is important that the Church of Jesus Christ recognizes the key role it could

have in the prevention of substance abuse and other addictive disorders. The authors encourage Christian helping professionals to become aware of stereo-types and myths which may distort their assessments of individual or family problems. This book gives the reader a good overview of the problem of addiction as well as other major psychological problems. This book also gives good insight into the multitude of treatment options and training material available to pastors, counselors, and chaplains.

In Chapter 13 of *The Black Family, Past, Present, and Future* by Lee June (1991), asserts that “it is impossible to consider the health of family life in America discussing drug abuse.” The author continues by saying, “Many people have lost their health, careers, savings, and severely damaged their relationships because of addictions to prescription drugs, cocaine, and alcohol. The author makes yet another powerful statement when he says, “I think of talented, young, black people who should be at the forefront of efforts to solve society’s ills, but instead, have wasted their talents at the end of marijuana joint.” (p. 201).

The author points out that drugs are commonly used in our society, from a dose of caffeine (coffee) at breakfast, to a dose of alcohol (wine, liquor) at dinner, and a couple of cigarettes in between. The author states that our society is very drug conscious, but is not necessarily informed regarding the facts about drugs (p. 202). The author asserts that people often confuse the term “drug abuse” with the use of “street” drugs like crack cocaine. In this chapter, the author defines drug abuse and drug dependency. The author defines drug abuse as the repeated use of a drug in spite of the knowledge that the drug is causing a problem in the person’s life. The author also asserts that drug abuse is also defined by the pattern of use in circumstances that are physically dangerous such as a



worker operating dangerous equipment after using narcotics or a truck driver using amphetamines to stay awake (p. 202).

Throughout the book, Lee June expresses the view that drug dependency can take two forms, physical and psychological. Physical dependency occurs when the individual who has abused drugs to the point where the body has adjusted to moving the drugs around (p. 203). Psychological dependency is abuse that happens when the individual repeatedly uses drugs in spite of the knowledge that the drugs are seriously hurting them (p. 204).

June offers several recommendations for treating drug abuse. The treatment should include options that address the addict, the addict's family, and finding ways that the church can be a place that offers hope, joy, and love. Below are some powerful options that the author cites (p. 208).

- Sponsor a 12-step program through a support group such as AA (Alcoholics Anonymous.)
- Sponsor a more explicitly, Christ-centered, support group such as Alcoholics Victorious or the Overcomers.
- Start a Bible study that focuses on Biblical answers to the needs of addicts.
- Develop a network of spiritual mentors who can assist the recovering addict to learn how to study the Bible, develop a prayer life, participate in worship, and network with other Christians committed to sobriety.
- Become active in holding elected officials and law enforcement agents accountable for their work in the surrounding community.
- Promise financial assistance for addicts who are seeking help but lack resources.

These are all great recommendations geared to helping solve the plight of addiction. Developing a network of mentors to assist those struggling with drug abuse

with Christian skills like prayer and Bible reading are successfully in helping addicts free the grip of addiction. Providing financial assistance for addicts who are seeking help but lack resources are important as well. Many drug treatment programs are expensive with the price tag being \$50K and up for the individual in treatment. In addition to the suggestions that June writes about, this author thinks that job training and a training course that is designed to help recovering addicts to re-enter the work place would greatly assist in getting the former addicts on their feet and moving them towards self sufficiency. These types of programs and ideas are important in sharing grace for addicted populations.

### **Biblical Foundations of Marriage**

Another exceedingly helpful book is *Marriage as Covenant*, by Gordon P. Hugenberger. *Marriage as Covenant* is a scholarly book that introduces and for some, re-introduces to others the importance of recognizing marriage as a covenant relationship between husband, wife, and God. Hugenberger helps the modern reader to appreciate fully the breadth of the Biblical concept of covenant. He relates to the reader that if marriage is understood in covenant terms, then divorce must be discussed as breaking of a covenant with God.

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God's covenant relationships with Israel. In Malachi, Chapter Two, Hugenberger interprets that God says to Israel, "I hate divorce." This depiction shows God's high esteem for the institution of marriage. This author believes that God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. Because of God's great and vast love for humanity, God blesses creation with the institution of marriage with a bond of love that cannot be broken. It is important for African-Americans to become consciously aware of the way that God approves covenant relationships.

*Generation to Generation* by Edwin H. Friedman (1985) illustrates for the reader how family theory points to a less stressful approach to the full range of clergy responsibilities. *Generation to Generation* (1985) applies the concepts of systematic, family theory and congregational dynamics that can be a useful model for the study of any family enmeshed in larger systems and from such systems may themselves be viewed as families. Friedman gives the reader concrete ways that clergy can often do much more to help their members' families by the way they lead their congregations through specific counseling interventions. We as clergy and counselors need to employ creative and concrete ideas, principles, and new skills in order to positively influence future generations.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter began by listing the heart-wrenching statistics of divorce in the minority community. African-Americans and Latinos share statistically high rates of divorce, single-parent homes, and high poverty rates. The African-American family is in a state of crisis. The serious problems of teen pregnancy, crime, substance abuse, family

dissolution, and unemployment are extremely critical issues. This author believes that these sad statistics can be turned into success stories with divine intervention and the creative use of the important information in these books. Good Christian literature and Christian information are instrumental to empowering couples and families while positively impacting the lives of African-Americans now and in future generations to come.

## CHAPTER 4

### A CASE OF A FAMILY AFFECTED BY MARITAL DYSFUNCTION

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will present the story of a family significantly impacted in a detrimental way by marital distress and dysfunction. This is a Christian family, and they are members of the writer's church. This part of the thesis will study this family with the final outcome of therapy in mind.

A brief history including the family of origin of the husband and wife will be described. Assessment of the current marital condition using The Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test, The Enrick Marital Inventory, The Taylor Johnson Temperament Analysis, and finally the Myers-Briggs Inventory will be included. A Genogram will be presented and a comprehensive treatment plan based on a Christian cognitive behavioral model will be developed. The family at the heart of this study has experienced the pain, drama, and trauma that is associated with dysfunctional families.

#### **The Problem at the Core of This Family**

Ted Sparks is a 38-year-old, married man, and the father of two children. Ted came to the author expressing a great need for counseling. Ted and his wife, Tina, have been married for nine years, and their relationship has been marked by numerous difficulties. Ted reports constant arguing with his wife, impatience with their children, and severe challenges on the job. Conversations with Ted and Tina uncovered deep personal issues and conflicts that had not been adequately dealt with. Further

conversations with Ted and Tina reveal deep personal pain, deep family pain, an extreme difficulty, connecting with others, and finally, a severe challenge in facing these issues.

### **Ted's Theological Background**

Ted was raised in a rural, Methodist church. Ted is extremely introspective. It is very challenging to get him to open up about his spiritual background. Ted believes in God, but Ted's commitment, challenges, and attitude towards God and others prevent him from exploring deeper into spiritual things.

### **Tina's Theological Background**

Tina was raised in a medium-sized city in Alabama. She comes from a loving family that believed that church was important in the life of family. Tina's mother is extremely active in their local church. As a result of Tina's upbringing, she, like her mother, is extremely active in the life of our church. Tina's father treated her like gold. Tina often speaks of how well her father treated them. Tina tells the story of when she was a college student and had a flat tire; her father purchased a new tire and sent it via a Greyhound Bus so that it would arrive on time to her. Unlike Ted, Tina has good memories of church, home, and family.

Tina had been raised to believe in the importance of God, family, marriage, and children. Tina earned an undergraduate degree in psychology from the University of Alabama and a master's degree in psychology from Alabama. In addition, Tina had put two years in at Alabama towards earning a Ph.D. in psychology. Because of the

problems and situations that have presented themselves in Tina's life, she has not been able to complete her Ph.D.

Tina mentioned that her mother and father did not prepare her for the harsh realities that come with life. As mentioned before, Tina's father treated her like gold. Tina's father often called Tina and her sister his "two gold pieces." Tina mentioned before that she wishes her parents had prepared her more for life. Specifically, Tina wished her parents had told her that life can be hard sometimes. Tina seems to have a fairy-tale view of life that distracts reality for her. She sometimes appears to not fully grasp things that someone of her age and educational background should grasp.

### **Presenting Problem**

Ted and Tina had been members of the author's church for four years. The author met Ted and Tina at a local restaurant where Ted worked as a manager. At the restaurant, Ted approached the writer at the table and said, "Are you the Pastor of Emmanuel Church?"

Ted and Tina visited the author's church after that encounter. Tina joined after the first visit. Ted visited frequently but never joined. Shortly after Tina joined the church, she rolled up her sleeves and became extremely active in the life of the church. Ted left the job he had at the restaurant and a string of jobs followed. These jobs kept him either traveling or out of town for extended periods of time.

In December 2006, Tina lost her job. Around this time, Ted took a job in Florida which meant he would be gone from home sometimes more than a month at a time.

During this time, Tina revealed what this author had suspected. She said, “Pastor, I feel like Ted has abandoned me.”

After roughly a year passed, Ted was fired from the Florida job and moved back home. He landed another job around October 2007 at a national restaurant chain. The new job took Ted away from the family again, because he had to go through a one-month, management training program. That Christmas was tough for Ted and Tina. They were short on resources and had trouble paying their rent.

Tina’s mother came to visit them during the holiday, and a few days before she was to leave to go home, she asked Tina if she was afraid of Ted. Tina said that she was not afraid of him. Tina’s mother then expressed that Tina didn’t seem like the same person she had been. She said, “I can’t tell you to stay or to leave Ted, but what I will tell you is don’t let him steal your joy!”

This author received an email from Tina that raised a red flag. In her email, she asked this author, “Pastor, what is a blessing?” This was of great concern to the author because in Bible study the parameters of a blessing were explained fully over a good period of time. What this author discovered was at the root of Tina’s questions was the fact that she had requested and received funding from the church, and Ted was harassing and threatening her, and causing her to feel guilty and second-guess herself for accepting the money. Ever since then it appears that Tina has not been her normal self in church. She has not been as involved as she normally would.

Ted appeared in church one Sunday and was openly affectionate towards Tina. The author felt as though this was an effort on Ted’s part to “display” to the pastor and the church that he was a good husband. Ted and Tina have two children, ages seven and



nine. Once during a men's meeting, Ted blurted out at an inappropriate time, "Tina makes me so mad, I can just choke her!"

### **Life Span and Life Analysis**

Ted has two older sisters and a deceased brother. Ted's parents are in their late eighties. Ted is reasonably close to his older sisters, but often distances himself from them when they try to help him and Tina financially, or when he feels they are trying to tell him what to do. Ted often says that he has no friends. Ted was very close to his older brother who committed suicide when Ted was 19. Ted is not very close to his parents, because of their age gap, but he does help take care of them. Ted's demeanor is exceedingly stand-offish, and he has difficulty expressing his emotions. Ted says he is the way he is because of his parents' ages, and the fact that little to no communication occurred with his parents when Ted was a child.

It is important to mention that there were a few things that Ted spoke about with joy. He displayed some emotions as he recalled playing baseball as a boy. Ted also appeared happy when he remembered when several college football stars attended a party he hosted while in college. Ted recalled with pride that many of those football stars went on to have professional careers. My interviews with Ted indicated that Ted is an intelligent individual. He majored in engineering in college but never worked in his field. Ted impregnated Tina in college and subsequently took the first job he could find as a car salesman to provide for his family.

While a car salesman, Ted saw a need for lunch to be provided at the car dealership. Many times they would become busy, and the staff members could not get

away for lunch. Soon after this, Ted began to make lunches and sell them to the people who worked at the dealership. This sparked an entrepreneurial spirit in Ted.

Later Ted had the opportunity to purchase a restaurant from his uncle. Ted and Tina got married and ran the restaurant for a few years. Some time later, Ted was forced to sell the restaurant for financial reasons. Ever since Ted sold the restaurant, he has gone from job to job. Ted has had six different jobs in the last four years. Ted and Tina's lifespan share many of the details of their lives. Here are some highlights from their lifespan:

### **Ted and Tina's Life Span**

1970	Born in South Alabama.
1987	Graduate high school.
1988	Enroll at the University of Alabama, Ted (engineering), Tina (psychology).
1989	Ted leaves the university and enrolls in a much smaller school.
1990	Ted meets Tina while they are both students.
1991	Ted's older brother commits suicide.
1992	Ted graduates from Alabama State University; Tina graduates from University of Alabama.
1993	Ted lands a job at an Atlanta car dealership.
1994	They discovers Tina is pregnant.
1995	Ted marries Tina.
1996	Ted purchases family restaurant from uncle.
1997	They discover that Tina is pregnant with their second child.

- 1998 Ted's wife graduates from University of Alabama with a master's in psychology.
- 1999 Ted's restaurant begins to have financial difficulties.
- 2000 Ted and Tina are given an old house by relatives.
- 2001 Ted has to sell the restaurant back to his uncle for financial reasons.
- 2001 Ted starts a management career at Applebee's Restaurant chain.
- 2003 Ted is promoted to management position.
- 2003 Ted and Tina join Emmanuel Christian Community Church.
- 2005 Ted transfers to an Applebee's out of state and is gone for weeks at a time while his wife and children stay at home.
- 2005 Ted gets tired of Applebee's and quits his job.
- 2005 Ted begins a network marketing business.
- 2005 Ted leaves network marketing and lands a job at another local restaurant.
- 2005 The owner of the restaurant promises Ted if he moves to Tallahassee, Florida and turns around a failing restaurant, he (owner) would help Ted start his own business.
- 2005 Ted tries to convince his wife to move to Florida to pursue this opportunity. Tina declines the offer by Ted to move to Florida. She is cautious about moving and feels that would be very risky if it did not work out.
- 2005 Ted moves to Florida and commutes home to see his family once a month on the weekend.
- 2006 Ted's wife confesses to the pastor of the church she feels like Ted abandoned her.
- 2007 Ted is fired from the restaurant job in Florida and is forced to move back home.
- 2007 Ted and Tina are forced to move from rental property because of financial reasons.

- 2008 Ted is putting in applications for employment at new car plant.
- 2009 Tina is now pregnant with their third child.

### **Ted's Family Background**

Since Ted is the person who has presented the most problems, this author will give a summary of Ted's family background. Ted has been around the things of God all of his life, however, he rarely shows any lasting interest in developing his faith. Ted appears to carry around a resentment of the things of God. He holds his feelings close and has a stand-offish demeanor. Ted's wife has stayed in the marriage, even though Ted has put her through some trying times. Ted's wife appears burdened and depressed about the relationship. She desperately wants him in the church; however, the more she seems to want him to attend church, the further away Ted seems to wander. Ted and Tina's relationship is the classic pursuer-distancer. The more Tina pursues Ted, the more it drives him away.

Everett Worthington explains that the distancer-pursuer pattern involves a spouse who demands intimacy (the pursuer) and another who avoids intimacy (the distancer.) In the later stages, the pursuer tires of the chase, withdraws, and criticizes the distancer. The distancer quickly recognizes that the pursuer is no longer pursuing and returns to a moderate distance, where barraged by criticism, the distancer fights back (Worthington, 1996).

Ted's father is a 40-year-old, veteran worker at a mill in Fort Mitchell, Alabama who grew up in poverty. Ted's father is a quiet, soft-spoken, hardworking man. He

acquired a 12<sup>th</sup> grade education. Ted's father married Ted's mother at an early age and had children shortly after they married.

Ted was born 17 years after his closest sibling in age. Ted's father and mother had him when they were relatively older. Ted's father was always working and providing for the family. Ted and his father did not develop a close relationship, and now as Ted's father is a senior citizen, Ted has assumed a caretaker role with his father because his sisters live far away. Ted seems to think that his father's quiet nature led to difficulties for Ted.

Ted's mother is the same age as his father. Ted is closer to his mother than he is to his father. Ted often vented his feelings to his mother and his older sisters when he could not express himself with anyone else. Ted's mother was a homemaker and a wonderful cook. Ted's mother and his uncle taught Ted how to cook. That interest led Ted to buy his uncle's restaurant. Ted's mother was the emotional glue for their family. Ted's mother is elderly now and is having some health issues. Ted seems concerned about his mother's health.

### **Psychological Testing**

Ted was assessed by Taylor-Johnson Treatment Analysis (TJTA) and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI.) The Taylor-Johnson test measures nine distinct personality traits and provides an assessment of psychological conditions. The Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (TJTA) is a personality analysis assessment tool that is used for individual, pre-marital, marital, and family counseling throughout the world as

an effective measure of nine bipolar dimensions of personality that are important in individual functioning and interpersonal relations (TJTA.com.)

The Myers-Briggs measures psychological types, describing unique gifts, inspirations, weaknesses, and strengths. The Myers-Briggs assessment is a psychometric questionnaire designed to identify certain psychological differences according to the psychological theories of Carl Gustaf Jung as published in his 1921 book, *Psychological Types* (1923.) These personality indicators were developed during World War II with the belief that knowledge of personality preferences would help women who are entering the industrial workforce for the first time to identify the sort of wartime jobs in which they would be most effective in.

### **Myers-Briggs Results**

Ted's reported personality type is ISFP. Otto Kroeger and Janet Thuesen call the ISFP personality type, the one who sees much but shares little (Kroeger and Thuesen, 1988). ISFP types struggle to maintain visibility, yet there is a love and sensitivity for others as well as an appreciation for life. ISFP's have a very low need to lead and control others and an appreciation for life. ISFP's are driven by a desire to see everything in proper order.

Both male and female ISFP's often sell themselves short. Ironically, Tina is also an ISFP. In this author's view, Tim and Tina are two exceedingly talented individuals who very often sell themselves short. It is documented that any complement an ISFP receives is dismissed as a "coincidence" or an "accident." The ISFP often raises the question after a defeat, "How could we lose when we feel so sincere?" Charlie Brown,

the consummate ISFP, has a strong need for action that compels him to try to kick the football fully knowing that Lucy will foil him every time (Kroegeer and Thuesen, 1988).

The fundamental question for Ted is how does he change and how does he facilitate change in his life? It is apparent to this author that Ted needs to implement change strategies into his life. This is a critical concept that John Oldham and Lois Morris speak about in their book, *New Personality Self-Portrait* (1995). This book grapples with the question of why people think, work, move and act the way they do. Oldham and Morris relate that changes in one's persona do not happen overnight. They speak of the time it takes for a Vietnam veteran to overcome the horrors of war and how much time and effort it takes to change attitudes and expectations that have been in motion for a very long time (Oldham and Morris, 1995).

Oldham and Morris write that the depressive personality types think there is no hope now or ever. These personality types seem incapable of pleasure. They cannot relax. They are critical and angry, heaping most of the abuse on themselves. All told, sadness and gloom dominate their perceptions of life (Oldham and Morris, 1996). Ted's attitude and demeanor may be due to a Depressive Personality Disorder that stems from issues revolving around his family upbringing. That added to his personality type of ISFP, the one who sees much but shares little.

As mentioned, Tina is an ISFP as well as Ted. Previously mentioned also is the observation that the ISFP personality according to Kroegeer and Thuesen is a personality that has much and shares little. This could explain Tina's lack of confidence in her own abilities. Tina is an exceedingly talented individual that rarely sees the good that she brings to the table. At first glance, Tina presents as charming, assertive, confident, and

capable. However, over a time of observation, it becomes clear that Tina needs constant supervision and a lot of positive feedback. Tina has mentioned in the past that Ted talks down to her in negative ways and tones. Ted has told Tina many times that nothing good will happen to them. Tina believed what Ted says when he criticizes her and talks down to her. This pattern of behavior seems to be congruent with the negative aspects of ISFP behavior.

### **TJTA Results**

The Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis is a widely used personality assessment for individual, marital, pre-marital, and family counseling. The TJTA measures nine bipolar personality traits that are important components of personal adjustment and interpersonal relationships. The TJTA's unique "Criss-Cross" testing feature identifies pertinent differences between couples, family members, and others in significant relationships.

PROFILE SUMMARY CHART (TED)			
TRAIT	TEMPERMENT	TED PARKS	SCORE
A	Nervous vs. Composed	Composed	Desirable
B	Depressive vs. Lighthearted	Depressive	Needed Improvement
C	Active-Social vs. Quiet	Quiet	Needed Improvement
D	Expressive-Responsive vs. Inhibited	Inhibited	Needed Improvement
E	Sympathetic vs. Indifferent	Indifferent	Needed Improvement
F	Subjective vs. Objective	Subjective	Needed Improvement
G	Dominant vs. Submissive	Dominant	Needed Improvement
H	Hostile vs. Tolerant	Hostile	Needed Improvement
I	Self-Discipline vs. Impulsive	Impulsive	Needed Improvement

Only one of Ted's traits falls into the "Improvement desirable" and seven of his trait scores fall into the "Improvement Needed" category. Ted is high scoring in the



“improvement needed” category indicates that he needs significant help in attaining his goal for self-actualization. Ted’s desirable score in trait A could be a place to attempt to build success.

Ted’s score on the Nervous/Composed scale indicates that he is able to maintain his composure and that he does not display nervous traits or gestures. Ted seems to keep his feelings and emotions close to himself.

PROFILE SUMMARY CHART (TINA)			
TRAIT	TEMPERMENT	TED PARKS	SCORE
A	Nervous vs. Composed	Nervous	Needed Improvement
B	Depressive vs. Lightheaded	Depressive	Needed Improvement
C	Active-Social vs. Quiet	Active Social	Desirable
D	Expressive-Responsive vs. Inhibited	Expressive-Responsive	Desirable
E	Sympathetic vs. Indifferent	Sympathetic	Desirable
F	Subjective vs. Objective	Objective	Desirable
G	Dominant vs. Submissive	Submissive	Desirable
H	Hostile vs. Tolerant	Tolerant	Desirable
I	Self-Discipline vs. Impulsive	Impulsive	Needed Improvement

Tina’s TJTA scores revealed six traits that fall into “Improvement Desirable” and three fell into “Improvement Needed.” Tina’s scoring desirable on traits C, D, E, F, G, and H indicate areas of possible growth and development for Tina. Tina needs a personal plan for growth and development regarding traits A, B, and I. As Tina seeks to improve for nervousness, seeks help for her depression and become more discipline, she will begin to see more of her personal goals become reality.

## **Diagnostic Impressions**

This author's diagnostic impressions are that this couple and family have a long history of hurt, anger, disappointment, and broken promises. Ted and Tina have two elementary school-age children who are affected by their parents' problems. Ted and Tina present with a classic distancer-pursuer relationship. For years, Tina has pursued Ted wanting him to love her and also wanting him to further himself. Ted has had multiple jobs and has refused to attend church with his family. Tina is hanging onto the relationship and wants to work things out with Ted. Ted is the resistant person in the relationship. Ted has been resistant about attending church. Ted has been resistant about seeking help. Ted has insisted on doing things his own way. However, the bright spot or the glimmer of hope in this relationship is that Tina seems committed to making this relationship work, and Ted has not left the family. He has always returned to his family even though he has moved away several times.

## **Treatment Plan**

According to Susan Johnson, every therapist has to answer these basic questions that will determine their focused treatment strategies (Susan Johnson, 2004). The three questions are:

- What is happening here? What is the problem? What is the target of intervention?
- What should be happening here? What is healthy functioning? What is the goal of the treatment?
- What must the couple do to change the problem and move toward a healthier relationship? How can therapy foster change?

## **Outline and Treatment Process**

Susan Johnson recommends a treatment process in Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) that encompasses three stages and nine steps (Susan Johnson, 2005). These three stages and nine steps are:

Stage 1.        Cycle De-escalation

Step 1. Identify the relational conflict issues.

Step 2. Identify negative interaction cycle.

Step 3. Access unacknowledged emotions that are underlying.

Step 4. Reframe the problem in terms of the cycle.

Stage 2.        Changing interactional positions

Step 5. Promote identification with disowned emotions and needs.

Step 6. Promote each partner's experience.

Step 7. Facilitate the expressions of needs and wants to restructure the interaction based on new understanding and creating bonding events.

Stage 3.        Consolidate new positions and cycling behavior

Step 8. Facilitate the emergence of new solutions to old problems.

Step 9. Consolidate new positions of attachment behaviors.

### **Ted and Tina's Christian Cognitive Behavioral Model and Plan**

- What is happening here? Ted and Tina are on the verge of divorce because of high conflict and volatility in their marriage.
- What is the target of intervention? The target of intervention is to get Ted and Tina the tools for them to communicate and resolve their issues in a Christian manner.

- What is reality functioning? For Ted and Tina, healthy functioning is for them to be able to communicate without volatility, crying, name calling, and negatively speaking.
- What must Ted and Tina do to move toward a healthier relationship? Ted and Tina, in order to have a healthy relationship, Ted and Tina must: A.) Commit to regular attendance at worship, Bible study, and prayer. B.) Agree to therapy once per week. C.) Agree to complete homework assignments. D.) Agree to continue therapy as the therapist recommends.

### **Ted and Tina's Three Stages and Nine Steps to Success**

Ted and Tina's plan for success consists of:

#### **Stage 1. Cycle De-Escalation**

In Steps 1 and 2, this author will attempt to identify the relational conflict issues and negative interaction cycles. The focus will be on therapy as an on-going recommendation and understanding Ted and Tina's emotions experience in their relationship. As the counseling session progresses, this author will seek to identify the negative interactive cycles that are trapping and creating distances between Ted and Tina. The author and therapist will attempt to call on Ted and Tina to become aware of the negative cycles and to see the effect of these negative cycles have on the relationship. The author and therapist will do this by connecting with Ted and Tina by building space where each feels safe, accepted, and understood. Since Ted and Tina are Christians, the author and therapist will incorporate prayer and Bible study into their therapeutic process.

After the completion of Steps 1 and 2, the therapist and author progresses to Steps 3 and 4. Step 3 consists of accessing unacknowledged emotions of Ted and Tina. In Step 4, the author and therapist reframe the problem in terms of underlying emotions and

attachment needs. As in Steps 1 and 2, the author and therapist will guide them to be aware of negative cycles.

In Step 5, the author and therapist will seek to promote the engagement on or before unexpressed needs and fears. The author and therapist will seek to assist and guide the couple through this step. The author and therapist will do this by utilizing the skills of reflection, validation, reframing, and listening. The author and therapist will also seek to understand how these situations evolved to this point. In addition, Step 6 will include helping Ted and Tina accept each other's unique emotional responses and discover better ways to respond to each other.

These two steps are keys to the success of Step 7 which is withdrawal re-engagement and blame softening. As will be detailed in Chapter V, Ted and Tina have expressed a great deal of hurt, anger, resentment, and blame. As a result of this, they have withdrawn from each other. Step 7 is the key re-establishment of the marital bond between them. In Step 7, Susan Johnson (2005) asserts that the more blaming partner results in the blamer softening event, wherein the partners are now able to ask for contact and comfort from a position of personal vulnerability. For instances, as Ted and Tina soften their positions toward each other, they in effect, are opening the door to rebuilding their marital bond.

The final two steps in Ted and Tina's plan for marital enhancement, enrichment, and restoration are Steps 8 and 9. Step 8 consists of the author and therapist offering and giving the couple to new solutions to response to old problems. Step 9 entails the creation of a new narrative and paradigm for Ted and Tina's marriage. The author and therapist believe that in order to salvage Ted and Tina's marriage, they both have to be

willing to implement new remedies to solve old problems. In Chapter V the author will detail Ted and Tina's therapy and document the progress made.

### **Summary**

Ted is a man approaching middle age and carrying a lot of emotional baggage from the past. His parents and other siblings are much older than he is. This raised serious emotional and communication issues for Ted. He was unable to relate to his parents because of their age. The only person he was able to relate to was his brother who committed suicide. Ted attended the University of Alabama as an engineering student and then transferred to Alabama State, graduating with a degree in engineering. Soon after graduation, Ted impregnated his girlfriend and subsequently married her. Upon graduation, Ted took a job as a car salesman. Over the last nine years, Ted has held a number of jobs and has struggled to keep his life, marriage, family, and career intact. This author believes that with God's help, there is hope for Ted, Tina, and their family. Chapter V will describe the actual conflict of the therapy and the progress that is made following the treatment plan that was designed.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The author will describe the actual conduct of the therapy and document the progress that is made following the treatment plan that was designed in this final chapter. The author will also describe the insight, ideas, and innovations that were gleamed from this program. A summation will reflect upon the author's growth pattern during this process.

#### **Outline of Counseling Sessions to Date**

##### *August 2007 – Assessment of MBTI and TJTA results*

Details in the assessment show personality styles that could prohibit or even hinder successful communication. Ted and Tina agreed after their assessment that they both had much work to do. Tina mentioned that she and Ted have to grow as people. They stated that they did not realize that a test could be administered that could give them insight about their personalities. The author observed that Ted and Tina appeared to be happy at the findings because it gave them a sense of not being the only people in the world like them. They felt isolated and alone. Even though they had family nearby, they appeared to have no one to confide in about their issues. Ted and Tina were given homework to discuss what goals they have for their therapy sessions. Tina was a willing participant; however, Ted was distant and aloof about being in counseling. Ted reluctantly agreed to cooperate with the counseling and homework.

*September 2007*

As this session began, I asked Ted and Tina to share with me their goals for our counseling time. Tina shared that the primary goal as far as she was concerned is for them to have a healthy, Christian marriage where they can work on the issues of life together as a team. Ted shared that his primary goal of the counseling session was to learn how to communicate with Tina without it turning into an argument or fight. Tina appeared eager to share, and Ted was more reluctant. The author said that he, too, had a goal for this counseling session: the healing of their marriage relationship and to assist them to experience all the fulfillment, satisfaction, and joy of a Christ-centered marriage. The session was concluded with prayer, and Ted and Tina were given a copy of H. Norman Wright's Marital Assessment Inventory to complete as a homework assignment.

*October 2007*

At the start of the session, the author reviewed the H. Norman Wright's Marital Assessment Inventory and discovered that the Sparks' marriage had some serious problems such as little to no communication, serious anger, mistrust, dishonesty, infidelity, and fraud issues as well as major differences in living out their faith. They were asked to comment on what the Marital Assessment revealed. Ted responded quickly, "We should have come to counseling a year ago." Tina replied, "I guess we have a lot of work to do." The author noticed their body language during their responses: Tina began to look as if she was rehearsing the painful moments in their relationship in her mind. Ted put his head down in despair at first, and then he lifted up his head, seemingly in disgust. They were asked to describe what they were feeling at the moment. They did



not answer. The author felt that the weight of the therapy session was starting to be felt by Ted and Tina and he then took the lead and explained that he wanted to do all he could to help them succeed in their marriage. He explained that this would be a slow process because old habits sometimes take a while to break. He said that even though this process would take a long time, he would be willing to work with them and pray with them through this situation. The session was concluded with prayer. No homework was assigned.

Counselor: Ted, has it always been hard for you to open up?

Ted: I tend not to trust many people.

Counselor: Why is that, Ted?

Ted: I just don't. People always try to tell me what to do, and I am sick and tired of that.

Observation:

Ted's score on the Depressive vs. Light-Hearted shows depressive traits. The DSM-IV describes the depressive personality disorder as a pervasive pattern of depressive cognitions and behaviors beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). Ted presents with the following traits: joylessness, gloominess, unhappiness, low self-esteem, critical, blaming, and derogatory towards self. The display of these attitudes and tendencies intrude on Ted's ability to be a good father.

Ted's Active-Social/Quiet score once again speaks to his tendency to "hold" his emotions inside and not give voice to his true inner feelings. This may be attributed to Ted's inability to relate to his parents because of their age and also because of the

generation gap of communication. These destructive attitudes and tendencies also intrude on Ted's ability to be a good husband and father.

Counselor: Ted, how is it that you feel people are always telling you what to do?

Ted: I don't know.

Counselor: Do you think they make suggestions to you because they love you and want to help you?

Ted: Probably.

Tina: Ted's sisters and I view him as being stand-offish most of the time. Whenever Ted's sisters or parents try to offer Ted advice or even financial help, it is to no avail. Ted refuses any kind of help, and it hurts our family because Ted would rather suffer loss than receive help.

Counselor: Tina, how do you feel when this happens?

Tina: Frustrated. Mad. Sad. Angry. Alone.

Counselor: Ted, what do you think as Tina expresses her emotions?

Ted: Looks away (no verbal response).

Observation:

Ted's low score on the Expressive Sympathetic/Indifference score indicates he has shut off his feelings in order to try to cope. So many things have happened to Ted that are traumatic events that he appears to have shut down his feelings and emotions in order to protect his inner self. It seems Ted developed the behavior pattern of closing off his emotions in early childhood.

*December 2007*

Counselor: Ted, how is your communication with your wife coming along?

Ted: Sometimes I want to choke her. (He pretends to choke Tina.)

Counselor: Why do you want to choke her?

Ted: Because she makes me so mad. (Ted becoming visibly angry.)

Counselor: How does she do that?

Ted: It's just the way she thinks, acts, and talks. She doesn't listen. It's like she has no sense.

Observation: As Ted laments about Tina, Tina begins to weep.

Counselor: Ted, why do you say that?

Ted: Because of the stupid things she says and does. I should have come in for counseling a long time ago.

Counselor: Ted, your remarks are hurtful to Tina; as you can see, she is crying. I know that you are upset, Ted, but words can be hurtful. The way in which things are said can really make a difference. Ted, if I could show you a few ways that could assist you to say what you need to say in a way that Tina can hear you and that would help you get to the root of some important issues in you, would you agree to that Ted?

Ted: I guess so.

Counselor: Tina, would you agree to give a few principles a try?

Tina: Nods her head while she wipes the tears from her eyes.

Counselor: Ted and Tina, a couple's expert by the name of John Gottman, wrote a book entitled, *A Couple's Guide to Communication*. In this book he describes the ways of good communication and lousy communication. According to Gottman, a lousy communicator

1) does not listen, 2) mind reads, 3) says, “yes – but...” 4) cross complains, 5) drifts off from the subject (drags in the kitchen sink), 6) interrupts, 7) initiates a stand-off, 8) invokes a heavy silence or escalates quarrels. 9) never calls a “stop action,” 10) insults the other person, and 11) does not validate, says, “That’s ridiculous. Now what I’m saying is...”

(Gottman, 1976, p.19).

Counselor: Now what do you think about the characteristics of a lousy communicator?

Tina: That’s what Ted does all the time.

Ted: Yeah, that’s right, blame me.

Counselor: Listen, you both agreed to give this a shot. Is what you’re doing right now working?

Tina: No.

Ted: No.

Counselor: Then why don’t you contract to give this communication plan a try?

Ted: Why not? Alright, I’ll try.

Tina: I’ll give it a go.

Counselor: Let’s look at the characteristics that Gottman said are evident in good communications. 1) Use stop action. 2) Ask for feedback. 3) Give good feedback. 4) Listen to both context and feeling. 5) Summarize and validate. 6) Check input with intent.

Counselor: Let this be your homework for next week.

*January 2008*

Counselor: Tell me, how was Christmas?

Ted: We tolerated it. Truthfully, it wasn't the greatest, but it was the best in a long time.

Tina: I agree. It has been a long, long, very long time since we tolerated one another.

Counselor: That's an encouraging beginning. I am interested in hearing about your homework assignment since our last session.

Ted, more expressive and talkative: The homework was the reason we tolerated each other during the holiday. The holidays are a tough time for me because (as a kid) we didn't have much and since my parents were much older, Christmas was just a regular day. We didn't talk much, we just did business as usual. When I married Tina I guess she didn't understand how I didn't make a big deal about Christmas and buying gifts.

Counselor: Tina, how do you feel about what Ted just said?

Tina: Yeah, for years our Christmas' were horrible, and I couldn't understand why. Until recently, and the communication plan helped.

Counselor: What did you think about the communication plan?

Ted: To be honest, I was very, very skeptical. It sounded good, but I think that it was too good to be true. I didn't think that it would work for me, but it did. Don't get me wrong, I got to be honest, it didn't always work because sometimes I didn't feel like doing all that work. When I did do it, though, we got along, we talked.

Counselor: Tina, what are your thoughts when you hear Ted now?

Tina: I didn't think that it would work because I was numb by all the arguing and fighting. I got to the point where I almost wanted to give up. But a couple of times, I kept thinking about the communication plan and gave it my best effort. To my surprise, we had a few good conversations and worked together on some things. We did have a few big arguments over what to buy the kids, because we were on a limited budget. But this

time, we kind of knew what we were fighting about. Sometimes Ted and I would holler, fuss, scream, and fight and not really know why or how to stop.

Counselor: Well, this is good to build on. For homework, I want you to continue to build on this success and continue practicing the communication plan.

*February 2008*

Counselor: Tell me of the progress you have made since the last time we met.

Tina: Progress. What progress? We have not progressed. We have regressed.

Counselor: What happened?

Tina: Ted lost it when the bills came in from Christmas time. We decided to purchase some items for Christmas with the hope that money would come in from somewhere.

When the money didn't come in, the relationship just began to go back to where it was before. We did not do any of the communication plans since we last came for counseling. Just about every attempt at talking turns into a fight.

Counselor: Has money always been a "hot" topic that leads to arguing?

Ted: Yes! And I am tired of this constant arguing. Maybe we should just call it quits.

Counselor: Call what quits? The counseling or the marriage?

Ted: The counseling and the marriage!

Observation: Tina begins to well-up with tears.

Counselor: I understand that you are frustrated over the finances right now, Ted.

Ted: You are right. I am frustrated over the finances. I'm tired of working and not making anything to show for my efforts.

Counselor: Once again, Ted, I understand that you are frustrated. However, last month you all made such good progress. It is not uncommon for couples to experience a setback while in counseling. Remember, Ted, I explained to you and Tina that this would be a long-term project, a long-term investment. Why don't you and Tina recommit to the contract. How about it, Tina?

Tina, crying: I know we should not have gone overboard on Christmas gifts. We thought, well, I guess I thought that things would continue to get better.

Counselor: Tina, last session I did see some improvement, however, it is very important for you to stick to the contract and work at it daily. Would you agree to recommit?

Tina, still crying: Yes, I will.

Counselor: Ted, as I see it, you and Tina were making good progress, however, you hit a snag in the road when you over-extended yourself during the holidays. The holidays many times have that effect on people to entice them to spend more than they can. Ted, if you would agree to honor the commitment to practice the communication plan, I will share some budgeting and debt reduction tips that will help you. Ted, I want you to understand that these debt reduction and reduced spending tips will not be easy. This, too, will require a commitment. However, if you will follow these tips, it will pay off. What do you say?

Ted: I'll try.

Counselor: Good. As we conclude today, let's review the communication plan. I want to add another component to the plan. Ted and Tina, I want you to use "I" when talking to each other about sensitive issues. For example, I suggest that when you have something important to say to each other, say, "I felt like this when this situation happened." When

you use “I feel” instead of the word “you,” it does not make the people you are attempting to communicate with get defensive. Using “I feel” statements has been proven to enhance communication between couples. Do you think you can give “I feel” statements a try along with the communication plan?

Ted: Yes.

Tina: Sure.

Counselor: Let’s go over some financial budgeting techniques. Here are some budgeting work sheets and some credit-crunching hand-outs to assist you with your finances.

*March 2008*

Counselor: During our last session, you both agreed to recommit to the communication plan. I then suggested that you integrate “I feel” statements in your conversations. Then, finally, I presented you with some financial worksheets to assist you with your monetary planning. How did it go?

Tina: We talked in depth after our last session and had a “heart-to-heart.” It really helped that we both used “I feel” statements. Not to be funny, but, I really feel that the “I feel” statements made the difference in our tone. (Both started to chuckle.) We laid it out and decided to give it a good effort and this month was much better.

Ted: Me, too. This month was a lot better than last month. I’m glad I didn’t quit.

Counselor: Ted is it easy for you to quit things?

Ted: Sometimes.

Counselor: Why do you think that is the case?



Ted: I've been thinking about that lately. The suicide of my older brother and the fact that I couldn't talk to my parents about it, I just kept it bottled up on the inside and whenever things got stressful in my life, rather than face it, I would just say, "Forget it."

Counselor: Has that behavior served you well over the years?

Ted: I don't like that about myself, I feel like I have quit when I should have stayed with things. I really don't want to live that way anymore.

Counselor: Would you turn to Tina and say that to her?

Ted: Tina, I've been thinking about my life lately and the choices and decisions I've made. I made some really bad decisions, and if I could go back in time and change them, I would in a heartbeat. I even left you and the kids to take jobs out of town, because I felt like a failure. I felt like I was supposed to be further in life than I was. Honestly, Tina, I wanted to leave but something kept bringing me back. I guess it was love. I didn't know what I was doing in purchasing the restaurant. All I knew was that I wanted to create a better life for the family, but I really don't know what to do. Nobody ever taught me.

Counselor: Tina, would you look at Ted and respond to his comment?

Tina, crying and trying to regain her composure: This time I'm crying for a good reason. Ted, it's been at least seven years since I've heard you say the word "love" in reference to me. Ted, I felt abandoned for years. I didn't know whether to stay or go. I was concerned about our children's welfare. I didn't know what to make of our marriage. All the money we owe to the IRS, all of our monthly bills... I didn't know what to do and now we're expecting our third child. I came into counseling not thinking anything would change between us, but this has been a more rewarding experience than expected. At

times my bags were packed. I was going to take the kids and go, but something made me stay as well. I guess that simply was love.

Observation: The mood and the spirit of the atmosphere changed dramatically.

Counselor: Let's conclude this session with my recommendation for you two to continue the communication plan. I would also like you to continue to use the "I feel" statements. I would suggest that you continue to use the financial planning worksheets I gave you at our last session. Finally, I want you to pray together every night. Ted and Tina, I am a Christian counselor, chaplain, and pastor. There are some things that only God can do, and I believe having a blessed marriage is a gift that only God can provide. Will you do that?

Ted: Yes, sir.

Tina: I will.

#### *April 2008 – Last Session*

We discussed homework assignments. Both partners have decided that they have to communicate better. They seem to have improved much in the area of communication. They said they have been using more "I feel" statements. They have begun praying for each other and for their children. They both admitted not to have completed the financial worksheet that I had given them. They also admitted that money was still a sore spot between them. At the end of our time, they agreed it was beneficial. Tina asked Ted to come back to church.

## **Summary of the Counseling Sessions**

Ted and Tina Sparks have experienced a great deal of anguish in their lives as individuals, as a married couple, and as a family. Tina presents to be the “glue” of the family that has served to keep everything together. Tina works hard in her job as a teacher assistant. She is also an important member of Emanuel Church where she serves as secretary, mentor of the praise team, and a dedicated member.

Ted, on the other hand, presents to be an exceedingly resistant individual. Ted’s parents were much older than Ted. His siblings are much older as well, and Ted only connected with his older brother. Ted’s older brother committed suicide right before Ted was to enter college. Ted impregnated Tina and soon married her. After Ted and Tina married, Ted had a plethora of jobs. Ted sold cars, purchased a restaurant with a bank loan, sold the business because it did not do well, worked several jobs, left town, began network marketing, left network marketing, and now Ted is on the management staff of a local Cracker Barrel Restaurant.

Ted and Tina’s counseling sessions went well - actually much better than expected. In counseling, the author quickly perceived that there was little to no communication going on. This author recommended that Ted and Tina follow a communication plan that included active listening, no interruptions, giving a summary of what was said, and then responding in an appropriate tone. Ted and Tina’s progress seemed to go in cycles. They started the plan well, and then hit a snag during the Christmas holidays. Because Ted and Tina had overspent during Christmas, when the bills arrived in January, they had a major blowup. As a result, they did not practice the

recommended communication plan, and they came extremely close to quitting counseling and their marriage.

At that time, the author negotiated with Ted and Tina to honor the contract they had made to give the plan a try. He also recommended that they begin their communication process by using the wording, “I feel” instead of the word “you,” which puts people on the defensive. He also gave them some simple-to-use financial and budgeting information from Crown Financial Ministries. Crown is a Christian-based ministry whose purpose is to get Christians out of debt so they can freely give to and serve the Kingdom of Christ Jesus.

During the next few sessions, things appeared much better. Ted and Tina had been using the communication plan and the “I feel” statements. Both admitted they were still struggling with financial issues but were willing to keep working at it. The author also recommended that they integrate prayer into their lives and ask God to bless their marriage.

Tina is a Christian; however, Ted only came to church twice last year and once the year before. During later counseling sessions, Tina spoke of wanting Ted to become a regular attendee at church. As the sessions came to a close, Ted and Tina commented that they felt better about their marriage than they had in a long time.

In following up with Ted and Tina, they appear to be having ups and downs in their marriage. Tina is pregnant with their third child, and Ted is looking for a new job. Yet they are sticking together. Tina really wants Ted to come back to church, but he has not as of yet. Tina hopes that the new baby will draw them closer to God and to each other. The author has not seen Ted in a while, but Tina is a regular attendee at church.

## **Personal Growth and Learning**

Completing this Doctorate of Ministry Program has been a tremendous blessing for me. When I received my Master's of Divinity in 1999, I thought if I were to go get a doctorate, it would be in either preaching or leadership development. The church that I was mentored in the ministry had a great set of married Sunday school teachers. They were just phenomenal. Their names are Gene and Rolland Palmore. The Palmores really touched and inspired my wife and me to love couple's ministry. Those Sunday school classes had a profound impact on my wife and me. We had workshops and learned together in that Sunday school class and the couples grew together. It was such a special time.

Six years later, in 2005, God had called me to start a church. At a church planting workshop and conference, The Billion Soul Conference, I saw a booth from Gordon-Conwell. I spoke with the representative, and I picked up several brochures. When I returned home, I began to feel compelled to apply to Gordon-Conwell for the Marriage and Family Doctorate of Ministry Program. I attempted to put it off, however, I kept feeling that I should apply. This went on for months until I finally applied and was accepted.

On day one I knew there was a reason God had me apply to the marriage and family track. Dr. Bradley and Dr. Pendleton talked about being blessed to be a blessing. Even though I had little prior coursework in psychology or counseling, and even though I felt over-whelmed, I knew I was in the right place. Dr. Bradley and Dr. Pendleton convinced me to do the advanced program track. Admittedly, the first year was really

tough. Being a husband, father, chaplain, and a student took a great amount of my time and was a great sacrifice. Yet by 2007, I began to settle in.

One of the greatest lessons God taught me in this experience is that I needed help as well. I initially thought that I would go to Gordon-Conwell and learn all this material from great professors to help other people. One of my greatest discoveries, however, during this doctoral program was that all the things I learned really helped me to be shaped and to grow. I know without a shadow of a doubt that because of what I learned from God, working through Dr. Bradley and Dr. Pendleton helped me become a better person, a more loving husband, a better father, and a more skilled pastor. I have truly been exceedingly blessed by this entire experience. The books that I have been introduced to, especially authors like Jack and Judith Balswick, Irving Yalom, John Gottman, Susan Johnson, and Randolph K. Sanders, have enriched my life tremendously. The friends that I have met at Gordon-Conwell will be life-long friendships.

Also during this time of study at Gordon-Conwell, my Father went home to Heaven. He passed on July 25, 2009. My Dad (Joe L. Scott, Jr.) had become my best friend and was my biggest cheerleader. The lessons my Father (Joe Scott) and Mother (Patsy Scott) taught me have help shape me into the man I am today. Working on this Doctorate afforded me an opportunity to spend precious time with my Mother and Father. I will always remember as I would drive to Gordon-Conwell's Charlotte campus. I would stay the weekend at my parent's home and they would pack me lunch for the week. This was a precious time for me that I will always cherish.

In addition, I would like to thank my wife, Shemal, for her love and support during this process. Along with my wife, I want to thank my children, Marlisa and

Marlon, Jr. In closing, I want to say that this program has given me the tools to be a far better man, Christian, husband, father, son, pastor, and chaplain.

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